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Cultural Processes and Transcultural Influences In Contemporary Central Asia

Issues addressed and the aims of the text

What is this text about? What are the goals of its author? Some preliminary explanations may help shape the expectations of the reader and prevent possible disappointment.

My main purpose is to give a three-dimensional overview of the state of cultural affairs in Central Asian societies after the states in the region achieved independence and to describe the main current tendencies defining local cultural processes and transcultural influences in the long term. I am interested in such themes as: culture and the changing political landscape; the institutional environment for culture; culture and education; culture and language; culture and ethnic minorities; culture and religion; the cultural marketplace; culture and business; culture and globalisation. My questions:

- how is the Soviet experience of "cultural construction" used and transformed in the modern nation-states of Central Asia?
- what restrictions on cultural production are imposed by the political situation and economic possibilities of these countries?
- how do the processes of isolationism and globalisation interact?
- what changes are being wrought by the islamisation of these societies?
- what is the future potential of secular, European-style, culture?
- who are the main players in the region's cultural space?

These questions might seem too general, but without considering and judging them, any attempt to understand the essence of events in narrower fields of cultural life is, surely, doomed to failure. In an "analytical note", a number of general recommendations for the work of international organisations in the cultural sphere of Central Asia are presented.

What is *not* within the scope of this paper? My objectives do *not* include a detailed description of the situation in, or forecasts for, each country. I cannot claim to have given an exhaustive survey of all cultural spheres, events, personages, and artefacts. Many of my conclusions have the appearance of a hypothesis or a supposition and are not the result of a specialised, monographic study. I will refrain from comments on any specific projects. A limited time for the preparation and writing of this text (two months) - and a very wide initial brief - did not allow more detailed research into individual cultural institutes and trends.

This work is not, therefore, an "encyclopaedia" of the culture of Central Asia. It is only a step towards an overview of the current problems and questions, and a look at what is happening in the culture as a whole in the region. Everything on this theme is the personal view of the author and does not reflect any collective opinion.

Some assumptions

Before beginning to discuss the main topic, I will lay out my assumptions about the definitions of some of the main concepts included in the title.

The first concept is *culture*. This is probably the most widely used - and so the vaguest - concept in the humanitarian sciences. It can be crudely defined in two ways. A wide definition is that any normative and value-related practice can be called culture; a narrow definition [states that] culture is the creation (usually professional and specialised) of [products of] aesthetic value. This distinction seems purely technical, but behind it lies a very real problem of ambiguity for [any] analysis and discussion of the subject. Is it possible to scrutinize "cultural processes" and "transcultural influences" in isolation from the context of political, economic, and social factors, and at the same time not to drown in the sea of all these problems? How [is one to] to single out questions for discussion and formulate possibilities for answering them?

The second concept which requires a more accurate definition is *Central Asia*. Even if we take one of its definitions, comprising the Asian former republics of the USSR (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), then it consists of a very complex, heterogeneous space with very unclear borders. It is not only a question of the obvious differences between the countries of the region on the levels of political regimes and power of the authorities, economic power, the pace and character of development in the post-Soviet period, historical experience, cultural potential, symbolic resources etc. It is also a question of the diversity of conditions and strategies within each country, determined by the presence of certain

social, ethnic and religious groups and communities. Is it not the case that any generalisations about "Central Asia" – or even generalisations within the national borders - might conceal all such distinctions and nuances?

Finally, I would like to make a third admission about the scope of this small investigation presented to the scrutiny of readers. Any study of a region or phenomenon is limited by the position the expert looks *from*, whether he is an external or an internal resident of the country, his professional experience (or field of study), his interests, preferences, his access to information and his opinions[1]. In addition to this, one could also mention the uneven distribution of data on different countries and problems, and the closed nature of many sources.

All these three assumptions set up the framework within which I can justify discussing the subject specified in the title, and at the same time they set the positions for inevitable and justified criticisms of my text for "incompleteness", "subjectivity", "sketchiness", etc.

A brief history

Before the region was conquered by the Russian empire, Central Asian society was entirely a part of the Muslim world, [and] the local culture developed under the strong influence of Islam, and Muslim views on aesthetics and ethics. It experienced Arabian, Iranian, Ottoman and other influences. The degree of this influence differed among different regions and groups, and in many places, especially among the rural, mountain and nomadic population, local forms of cultural production were preserved, which sometimes differed considerably from pan-Islamic models.

At the turn of the 20th century, Central Asian society, which by that time was part of the Russian empire, became familiar with elements of secular and European culture brought to the region directly with Russian rule and by the Russian-speaking population. Many elements of secular culture were assimilated through contacts with other Muslim communities (Russian Tatars, Persia, British India, and the Ottoman Empire) which had also entered a period of transformation in social, political and cultural practice under the strong influence of European powers. At the same time, secular education develops, local forms of theatre and non-religious literature appear, and there is a penetration of new fashions, tastes, and ideas.

[1] The author is an anthropologist and for 20 years has been researching in central Asia. The current report is based on material from his own observations, and also many conversations with cultural professionals, academics, and inhabitants of the region. Significant assistance in the preparation of the report was rendered by the academic and writer Yevgeniy Abdullaev (Uzbekistan).

The establishment of Soviet rule in the Central Asian region led to the most radical and dramatic changes in cultural processes. Mass repressions among the local elite, including cultural workers, and the fierce persecution of many Muslim and local practices, were accompanied simultaneously, and on a large scale, by the introduction into the life of Central Asian societies of secular and European forms of culture, fast vertical social mobility, an increase in literacy, more open admission into the political, scientific and cultural elite of formerly marginal groups and classes (in the first place, women). Summarising these changes, it is possible to identify the following trends (making no claims to be an exhaustive list):

- A powerful and costly state-institutional foundation for cultural production was created: compulsory educational programmes; specialised schools and higher educational institutions, museums; theatres and cinemas; film studios; professional groups with considerable privileges, etc, together with the large-scale inclusion of almost all sections of the population in the cultural process;

- Although the cultural process was closely connected with ideology and propaganda, rigidly and hypercritically controlled by the party elite, regulated by the state (one feature of this regulation being state financing), it constantly "outgrew" its established limits and produced cultural forms and ideas far beyond the bounds of ideology and propaganda;

- According to the official formula "national in form, socialist in ideas", cultural practices were brought into national frameworks: through the creation of national republics (both federal and autonomous), and the stimulation of national self-awareness, "national cultures" were institutionalised, having a secular character and European forms of expression, non-traditional to the region;

- In the new national frameworks many pre-Soviet and pre-Russian artefacts of art, architecture, literature, etc. were restored, rebuilt and preserved; some elements of former Muslim and local practices gained legitimacy as folklore and ethnic culture;

- A Russification of significant parts of cultural life and of the cultural elite took place; the Russian language became not only the language of cultural dialogue, but also the language of contact with secular, European and global cultural achievements; and a large Russian-speaking community, influential in all spheres, emerged in the region;

- During the Soviet period, which offered a mass programme of total cultural intervention into Central Asian society, there emerged a relatively large, well-educated social class, oriented towards European (and Russian) cultural achievements and with a high social status;

> … A deep reorganisation of the whole socio-cultural system: the transition from a holistic to an individual paradigm, a change in the socio-cultural type of personality and in the mechanisms of socio-cultural control. It was this transition which defined the true nature of the cultural revolution through which almost all the regions and peoples of the USSR needed to pass on the course of modernisation … For the populations of such parts of the USSR as Central Asia and Transcaucasia ... the increase in levels of education, considerable changes in lifestyle and in everyday behaviour went together with the preservation of traditional socio-cultural foundations and so did not put deep internal pressures on society as a whole. The crisis of traditionalism was moving always nearer, due to the accumulation of socio-cultural novelties, [but] here in the middle of the 20th century the peak of schism and division [in society] and the marginalisation of the population still lay in the future.
> **Anatoly Vishnevskiy, *The sickle and the rouble* (Moscow, OGI,)]**

- In cultural production, a variety of schools and trends were formed - from classical (in the spirit of "Soviet realism") to avant-garde, and the local culture symbiotically combined European, Russian and local (settled, nomadic, etc.) roots and styles. In general it [i.e. the culture of the region] was peripheral and derivative, but at the same time quite independent and mature;

- The Soviet project of cultural transformation remained unfinished, and a considerable part of the Central Asian population, despite the rather efficient intervention of the Soviet regime, remained outside beyond the reach of cultural processes in the capitals and cities. Life in remote rural places preserved a number of old habits and practices, as well as a lack of understanding of, and antipathy towards, European and Russian culture.

I would like to underline that all of these processes occured in different ways, and to different depths and intensities, across the various Central Asian republics. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan the Russian-speaking, secular culture had a very strong impact on the outlooks and practices existing throughout society; but in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan this influence was experienced primarily by the urban population, particularly those living in the capitals.

Post-Soviet conditions. General observations

The disintegration of the USSR led to considerable shifts in cultural processes and transcultural influences. It is possible to identify - again without making claims to exhaustive analysis - several pathways that the post-Soviet transformations took.

Firstly, the legitimation of the former Soviet republics as independent nation-states. The authorities attempt to preserve state control over culture as an ideological tool, which compels them to preserve Soviet institutions. At the same time, the new ideology is based on the idea of "returning to one's own authentic roots" and the idea of "returning to the wider world". The question is: how are "authentic roots" to be understood, and what links to the "wider world" would appear acceptable to the post-Soviet elite? Depending on what kind of discussion develops on these themes, and also what answers the authorities formulate, each state forms its own politics of memory and forgetting, designing and borrowing.

Secondly, there is the narrowing of state influence and an expansion in private cultural production. Despite all their ambitions to control and direct cultural processes in society, the present authorities of the Central Asian countries do not have sufficient material resources, or an accurately articulated agenda, or an understanding of cultural processes. The cultural infrastructure established during the Soviet period has proven to be superfluous for the new regimes. This is the reason why cultural production as a whole in many respects relies on private activity and even survives independently, with minimum state interference and support. The state still funds and supports only occasional cultural projects with obviously ideological aims.

Despite the fact that these changes proceeded differently in each country, it is possible to uncover several common tendencies:

- The emphatic rejection of earlier Communist doctrines as the ideological basis for cultural policies, and a search for new alternatives. At the same time, the preservation of in full of the Soviet model of cultural management and its major institutions (and budgeting for cultural projects according to the "residual" principle[2]);

[2] *Transl. note:* This refers to the principle of funding cultural activity with money left over after the financing of more 'important' projects (e.g. military & industrial).

- A sharp reduction in state funding of cultural development, resulting from economic recession, especially in the early 1990s, leading to a outflow of specialists from the cultural sphere and the commercialization of culture, especially in the sphere of leisure and entertainment;

- The growth of nationalism and traditionalism in the cultural sphere; and a gradual, both directed and unplanned, de-Russification (narrowing the sphere of usage of Russian language in culture);

- Acceptance, to a greater or lesser degree, of unofficial, alternative currents in literature and art, with rather weak "protest potential" and confined to narrow elite groups; and a widening gulf between mass and elite cultures.

Characteristics of each country in brief

Kazakhstan. The most multinational state in the region, with a 45% non-Kazakh population (Table 1), and the largest percentage of Russian-speaking people in the region, including among the ethnic majority. Despite a quite authoritarian type of government, private cultural initiatives, as well as state projects, operate and are supported.

Table 1. Population of Kazakhstan (according to the 1999 census)

	Number of people of stated nationality	
		%
Total population	**14953 126**	**100**
Kazakhs	7 985 039	53,4
Russians	4479618	30,0
Ukrainians	547 052	3,7
Uzbeks	370 663	2,5
Germans	353 441	2,4
Tatars	248 952	1,7
Uyghurs	210339	1,4

There are 48 theatres, 62 concert organisations, 154 state museums, 8 historical and cultural museums [of special historical interest[3]], and 2259 club-type establishments. Among the theatres: 2 opera and ballet theatres, 33 drama theatres, 4 musical comedy theatres, 4 children's theatres, and 5 puppet theatres. There is also a national film studio, *Kazakhfilm,* named after S.Ajmanov. In Kazakhstan there are 3539 libraries stocking 115.4 million units. The National library of the Republic of Kazakhstan houses a centre dedicated to the search and acquisition of rare books of national value and also carries out restoration of books and ancient manuscripts. The majority of national cultural institutions are situated in Almaty. During the last decade there has been intensive development in the cultural infrastructure of the city of Astana, which has the K.Bajseitovo National Opera and Ballet Theatre, and where the Presidential Cultural Centre and the National Academic Library of the Republic of Kazakhstan have been established.

There is an active Writer's Union with 5 regional branches; it publishes the journals *Szhuldyz* (in Kazakh), and *Prostor* (in Russian). Other literary associations include the PEN Club of Kazakhstan, the public charity "Musaget", and the young writers association, "Central Asian Literary Front". Literary awards: the Alash Prize (awarded by the Writers Union of Kazakhstan), the J.Kazakova Prize (awarded by the PEN-Club), and the Tarlan Prize (awarded by the Art-patrons' Club of Kazakhstan).

Since 1997, under the patronage of president N.Nazarbaev, an international festival of creative youth "Shybat" ("Inspiration") has taken place. There exists an Art-patrons' Club of Kazakhstan (though in the opinion of correspondents, it is too closely affiliated to the authorities. There is an annual nationwide competition "Astana-Baiterek".

Within the government there is a Ministry of Culture and Information (http://www.sana.gov.kz). The cultural sphere is regulated by the laws "On culture", "On the protection and usage of historic and cultural heritage", and "On the national archive fund and archives", and also by a Programme of Development in the cultural sphere for the period 2006-2008.

There are signed agreements on collaboration in the field of culture with 49 countries and international organisations. Amongst the international organisations carrying out cultural projects

[3] ***Translator's note:*** There is no easy English equivalent for the Russian ***zapovednik***, which implies a 'reserve', or protected site of special interest, whether cultural, historical or a place of natural beauty.

in Kazakhstan are the Soros fund, the Dutch fund "Hivas", the Ebert Fund, *Roszarubezhtsentr* [the Russian Foreign Centre] and others.

Kyrgyzstan. The basic government organ which deals with the politics of culture is the Ministry of Culture and Information (http://www.minculture.gov.kg), which was reconsituted after the "revolution" of 2005 (before that, it existed as a separate department of the Ministry of Education). In Kyrgyzstan there is an Institute of Arts and a Conservatoire. State initiatives in the field of culture include the "Madaniyat" programme (1997-2000) and the "Bilim" educational programme. There are also some active professional associations: a National Writers union, the Bishkek PEN-Centre, a Cinematographers Union, an Artists Union, etc. Besides that, there are 577 club-type establishments, 32 state museums, 1010 state libraries, 8 art galleries, 20 theatres, 9 of which are in Bishkek. Funds include the Meerim Fund, the Tolomush Okeev Fund, the Chingis Aitmatov Fund and others. There is a film studio, "Kyrgyzfilm". Some literary journals are [also] published: *Literary Kyrgyzstan*, *Literary Asia* and *Kurak*.

Bishkek has several times been the centre of region-wide projects. The Central Asian Academy of Literature has been operating since 2001, and has carried out a number of joint projects aiming at bringing together writers in the region (the publication of the almanac *We are all your children, Asia* and the organisation of a motor rally "Caravan of Friendship"); in 2003, the Central Asian Academy of Arts was founded.

Table 2. Population of Kyrgyzstan (according to the 2000 census)

	Number of people of stated nationality	
		%
Total population	**5 000 000**	**100**
Kyrgyz	3 333 275	66,9
Uzbeks	703 971	14,1
Russians	530 572	10,7
Dungans	55 866	1,1%
Uyghurs	48 647	0,9
Tajiks	45 062	0,9
Kazakhs	41 817	0,87

Tajikistan. One of the poorest countries in Central Asia. The majority of the population is Tajik, and the largest ethnic minority is Uzbek (Table 3.)

Table 3. The Population of Tajikistan[4] (according to the census of 2000)

	Number of people of stated nationality	
		%
Total population	**6127,5**	**100**
Tajiks	4898,4	80
Uzbeks	936,7	15,3
Russians	68,2	1,1
Kyrgyz	65,5	1,1

The culture of Tajikistan was seriously damaged by the civil war of the 1990s and its aftermath. Apart from the direct destruction of objects of culture [and] education, long-term negative effects resulted from the outflow of a considerable part of the educated population and intelligentsia out of the country; the marginalisation of a considerable part of the population, and a sharp reduction in state subsidies for culture. Besides that, in Tajikistan as a whole, the influence of Islamisation has been felt on various spheres of cultural life more strongly [than in the other Central Asian countries].

The Tajik government possesses a Ministry of Culture and Information (http://www.kultura.tj). The cultural sphere has been regulated by a special law "On culture", since December 13, 1997. In the cultural sphere there are: 1,018 clubs-type establishments, 39 state museums, 24 folk theatres; 36 musical and dance ensembles, 15 state theatres and 6 state concert organisations. There are 1,368 state public libraries with a total stock of 12.5 million books. There is a Writers' Union (which publishes the journal *Pamir*). Among the other non-governmental cultural organisations are: the "Pushkin Society", founded under the aegis of the Council of Russian Compatriots of Tajikistan; and the Z.Shahidi Fund (which publishes the magazine *Fonus*).

Professional education in the sphere of culture and art is provided by two higher education institutes: the M.Tursunzade Tajik State Institute of Arts (1069 students) and the Tajik National Conservatoire (206 students). In the sphere of secondary education there are 6 specialised colleges (1034 students), 2 "republican secondary boarding schools" (707 pupils), 2 lyceums attached to colleges (178 pupils), and 79 music and art schools (9747 pupils).

[4] *Transl. note:* the format of the population tables in original text appears inconsistent [this should perhaps be + '000, for comparison with previous table?]

The government has signed agreements of cooperation in the field of culture with Kuwait, the Russian Federation, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Iran, China, Germany and Armenia. Apart from that, in Tajikistan's cultural sphere, the Agahan Fund, the Soros Fund and others are active. A number of cultural exchange events are arranged by the friendship societies (with Russia, China, Iran, and others).

Turkmenistan. This country is, of all the Central Asian states, the most isolated from the outside world. All processes, contacts, and exchanges are strictly controlled by the authorities and the entire administrative system is constructed as a hierarchy subordinate to the president at the top. Any reforms or changes in the cultural sphere depend on the personal tastes and ideas of the leader of Turkmenistan.

In 2003, the Ministry of Culture and Telecommunications was created on the basis of the [existing] Ministry of Culture. In 1993, on the basis of the [existing] Institute of Arts, two Institutes were created – the Conservatoire and the Turkmen State Institute of Culture (TSIC), where, as well as museum personnel, theatre and cinema actors are trained in other faculties. The Conservatoire provides training on both modern and folk instruments. There are several theatres of different types, museums and other cultural institutions and associations, but unfortunately, it was not possible to ascertain a precise list of these.

Table 4. Main ethnic groups of Turkmenistan (according to 2005[5] data)

	Number of people of the stated nationality	
		%
Total population	**5000000**	**100**
Turkmens		81
Uzbeks		9
Russians		3,5
Kazakhs		1,9
Azerbaijani		0,8
Tatars		0,8
Baloch		0,8
Armenians		0,7

Uzbekistan. Cultural politics in Uzbekistan is quite closely controlled by the President and defined by his personal preferences. However, this control is primarily focussed on architecture

[5] There are no reliable statistics on the number and structure of the population of Turkmenistan at present. See: http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2006/0237/analit08.php

and monumental sculpture, and also on mass culture (popular music, etc.) and film-making. The basic state organ is the Ministry of Culture and Sports (http://madaniyat.sport.uz). There are no significant state funds[6] or awards (except for the State Award in the sphere of culture and art), or any [significant] private funds or awards, due to the lack of development of institutions of artistic patronage. An exception is the "Fund for Culture and Arts of Uzbekistan", which is headed by the daughter of president G.Karimov. The majority of NGOs working in this sphere were involved in folk arts and handicrafts (most of them are currently closed). The main creative professional associations have remained since Soviet times: the Composers Union, the Artists Union, and the Writers Union; the latter publishes the literary journals *Shark Yulduzi* (in Uzbek) and *Zvezda Vostoka* [Eastern Star] (in Russian). The Ministry of Culture and Sports publishes the journals *Mozijdan Sado*, *Teatr* [Theatre], *Guliston*, and the newspaper *Uzbekiston Adabieti va Sanjati* ["Literature and Arts of Uzbekistan"].

The association "Uzbekteatr" includes 37 professional theatres and a number of theatre-studios, including: 1 opera and ballet theatre performing in two languages (Uzbek and Russian), 7 drama theatres (3 of them performing in Russian), 14 musical and musical-drama theatres (including one performing in Russian, and one in Karakalpak), 4 youth theatres and children's theatres (including one Russian, and one Karakalpak), 10 puppet theatres (one Karakalpak, and four bilingual Uzbek and Russian). There are also a few theatre-studios: "Ilkhom", "Aladin", "Mulokot", "Eski Machit", "Turon" and others. In Uzbekistan there are 85 state museums: 10 of them are art museums, 31 literary museums, and 3 large museum-sites of special historical interest: in Samarkand, in Bukhara and in Khiva ("Ichan-Kala").

Table 5. Main ethnic groups of Uzbekistan (2005 data)

	Number of people of the stated nationality	
		%
Total population	**25427,9**	**100**
Uzbeks	20133	79,2
Russians	1053,5	4,1
Tajiks	1237,4	4,9
Kazakhs	977,8	3,8
Karakalpaks	549,2	2,2
Tatars	275,4	1,1

[6] The "Artmadad" fund is active in the creative association "Uzbekteatr", and the Mukarram Turgunbaeva fund in the "Uzbekraks" folk dance association.

In 2004 the country had 5735 libraries (with a total stock of 57.9 million units). The National Navoi Library stocking 10 million units is the largest in Central Asia. However, since 2006, in connection with library reform and transformation of the libraries into so-called "Information and Resource Centres", the number of libraries has considerably reduced.

Nowadays, in the republic, in these fields, there are primary institutions (music schools and art schools), specialised secondary stage schools (specialist academic-musical lyceums, colleges of art and culture) and higher (the Conservatoire, the Institute of Culture, the Institute of Arts, and the Higher school of Folk Dance and Choreography). The Ministry of Cultural Affairs operates 311 music and arts schools, 25 specialised secondary schools and 4 higher educational institutions.

The most significant cultural initiatives are the"Ilkhom-90" music festival (curated by composer D.F.Janov-Yanovskiy; and not held since 2004) and the Tashkent Open Festival of Poetry (curated by writers S.Janyshev, V.Muratkhanov and S.Aflatuni, and held six times since 2001). Other festivals held include festivals of video art, rock festivals, a singer-songwriter festival ("Autumn chord"), etc.

The main foreign donors in the cultural sphere in the late nineties and early twenty-first century were the Soros Fund and IREX; after 2003 cultural initiatives have been supported by separate agencies of the United Nations (UNESCO, UNDP [United Nations Development Programme], etc.), the Swiss Bureau of Cooperation Culture and Arts Programme, by several embassies (US, Russia, Germany, Japan, France, and others), the Institute of Eurasian Studies (Russia), etc.

Culture and the changing political landscape in the region

It is impossible to study problems of culture without considering the wider context of how power relations, domination, influence and resistance develop.

The extremely politicised model of cultural organisation (and even self-organisation) in Soviet society minimised, on a practical level, any non-state, unsanctioned or politically 'neutral' forms of cultural existence. A perception of culture as a 'superstructural' element, belonging to nobody, built on top of the economic (but in reality, political-administrative) basis [of society]; a view of culture as somewhat secondary to 'ideology' (culture being at the same time inseparably linked [to ideology], and also an expression of it) – all these notions, indoctrinated over decades of the Soviet period, continue to have an influence over the cultural politics of the states of Central Asia.

The political elites of the Central Asian states have inherited, to a significant degree, Soviet approaches to cultural politics. Right up until the end of the 1990s they were occupied principally with [finding] solutions to acute economic problems and the gradual strategic strengthening of their own regimes; cultural questions were relegated to second and even third priorities. Since the beginning of this decade, the regimes have felt themselves to be well-consolidated; the sharpest consequences of the economic crisis have been surmounted. However, the financial resources which have begun to appear, as in the Soviet period, are being spent not on the support and development of cultural initiatives, but on an assortment of ideological "projects".

The formation of conservative ideologies, copying the rhetorical devices and methods of former Soviet propaganda is a process continuing at present – with a greater or lesser intensiveness – in all the states of Central Asia. As in the Soviet period, the main ideologue tends to be the head of state, who is the author of numerous articles and books. In 2000-2001, nearly all the presidents stepped forward to declare ideological programmes: the "National Ideology" in Kazakhstan, the "Ideology of national independence" in Uzbekistan, "Rukhnoma" ("the Book of the Spirit") in Turkmenistan, and the presidents of Tajikistan and Kyrgizstan wrote works giving their own interpretation of the history of their peoples. In Uzbekistan, study of the President's works was made compulsory at all levels of the education system, and in the *khokimyats* (organs of local power) it became a requirement that there would be a deputy involved in ideological questions. The traditionalism of the "Ideology of national independence" was particularly obvious. In 2001, the Uzbek leader I.A. Karimov designated that one of the main aims of the "ideology of independence" was to form "in our people … an ideological immunity", "to fill the vacuum … that appeared as a result of the rejection of the old ideology, with a new one: an ideology of national independence, in order to actively counteract the penetration of alien ideologies and destructive ideas into Uzbekistan"; further, "workers in the spiritual-enlightenment spheres"

> It would be reasonable to expect that, as in economics, with its diversity of forms of activity and ownership, so in culture and cultural politics, the direction taken will be [towards] an ethno-cultural pluralism, cultural tolerance, diversity of cultural manifestations and creation of a multicultural society… However, it seems that, in the new independent states, this objective – though continually proclaimed at the governmental level - is not fully practised in official cultural politics. On the contrary, there is an opposite tendency – to create culture based on mono-national, mono-ethnic foundations, and even of the archaic type… The process of archaisation of culture and the different aspects of public and private life has taken over the whole territory of Central Asia and Kazakhstan.
> **Alexandr Dzhumaev. "Can we find ourselves in the current of change?" *Druzhba Narodov*, 2008. No.4.** (http://magazines.russ.ru/druzhba/2008/4/d13.html)

were set the task of "perfecting and affirming the principles of the ideology of national independence in the consciousness of the people" [7].

In general, the nostalgia of the new Central Asian "national ideologies" for the past, and an obsessive aspiration to interpret and mythologise the events of antiquity, is one of the characteristic manifestations of traditionalism and conservatism within these ideologies. Without any doubt, the "resource of history" is actively exploited, with this aim, by all contemporary political regimes, especially those that obtained national independence recently. However, in the modern states of Central Asia, and in Uzbekistan to a greate extent, it has almost completely overshadowed another, no less vital component of political discourse – a national strategy of development for the future. Although there is no lack of political promises in the Central Asian states, they are nevertheless usually connected to a vague, long-term future[8], in comparison with which even the extremely distant and mythologised past to which the Central Asian presidents appeal, seems more alive and more concrete. As a result, from all cultural objectives, the political regimes have given the most attention to the construction of monuments to ancient and medieval heroes, the creation or re-establishment of historical museums, etc.

The break with Russian culture and the Russian language; the state support exclusively given to national forms and genres of art; alphabet reform; the stagnation in publishing activity; the aversion of the majority of society towards new and fashionable trends in art; the absence of art-criticism as a genre in the mass media and on TV; the absence of open [art] competitions and festivals (apart from those which take place at the expense of Western charitable funds or other grant resources); the neglect, or formalistic approach to the problems of child and adult literacy – and much more besides – [all] speak of the fact that these states do not require cultured, educated, thinking citizens. Such [citizens] are more difficult to govern, and may genuinely demand democratic values, freedoms and rights.
Lilia Kalaus, book publisher, Almata.

The foregoing does not mean that the new ideologies of Central Asian states are only a modification of Soviet ideology, given some kind of new life by a new, semi-traditional, semi-liberal, rhetoric. Reconstruction of the former Soviet ideological system with its over-arching views of historical processes and massive modernising zeal for the creation of "a new society" and "a new person" would be impossible, due to the absence of the financial, organizational and human resources which the Soviet authorities had at their disposal.

[7] I.A. Karimov. Foreword to "The Idea of national independence: main concepts and principles" // for the prosperity of the Motherland – an answer for each of us. T.9. Tashkent: *Uzbekiston*, 2001, p204–5.
[8] For example, "*buyuk kelajak"* (the "great future") in Uzbekistan; "Kazakhstan 2030" in Kazakhstan, etc.

The institutional aspect: destruction and preservation of the Soviet system of cultural management

The cultural infrastructure inherited by the countries of Central Asia from the Soviet period bears the stamp of the "Soviet project" - aiming at the gradual familiarisation of the local population with Russian and European standards of culture and the inclusion of national cultures into a western-style, communal secular space. This infrastructure included numerous museums, theatres, cinemas, libraries, thousands of rural "culture clubs", etc. with hundreds of thousands of employees, large-scale purchases of exhibits, requisites, equipment, books, and so on. The Soviet project was ambitious and required large financial and political efforts. The contemporary states of Central Asia either do not have such ambitions, or do not have the required political or financial possibilities. The cultural institutions created during the Soviet era have clearly proven to be superfluous for the young nation-states.

The authorities of Central Asia, finding themselves in a difficult economic situation in the 1990s, had to significantly cut funding for the cultural infrastructure and focus only on its most prestigious elements (from the political and symbolic points of view). However, weak attempts to completely ignore any obligations regarding the preservation of this infrastructure were met by the strong resistance of the local cultural elite and pressure from the international community, which interpreted this as a refusal to maintain secular principles of state-building (whether pro-western or pro-Russian) and an infringement of the rights of different categories of the population. None of the states has its own fully-developed strategy or [set of] policies in the cultural sphere and the ruling elites are not showing any noticeable intention to develop such strategies. In some cases the cultural sphere has been given into the care of funds managed by relatives of the presidents, such as the wife of former leader A.Akaev (Kyrgyzstan), or the daughter of I.Karimov (Uzbekistan).

> Methods of cultural administration in Uzbekistan have not changed very much since Soviet times. Almost every aspect of cultural sphere, from sewing circles in the rural "house of culture" … to the repetoire of the Theatre of Opera and Ballet are within the purview of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. The overwhelming majority of professional actors, musicians, and artists in the country depend on the state for their living. To this day, a Soviet understanding of how to develop culture (by state means) and with what aim to utilise it (ideologically), predominates. Innovations in the cultural sphere are still rare, due to ever more limited financial resources, the maintenance within the state sector of the institutions inherited from the Soviet authorities, and the lack of importance given to alternatives to the Soviet discourse of nation and identity.
> **Laura L. Adams. "Invention, institutionalisation and Invention in Uzbekistan's national culture",**

Turkmenia was the only country that managed to partially re-structure Soviet-style cultural institutions. In 2001 Turkmen president S.Niyazov having submitted the works of theatre and music companies to a critical review, decided to cut the number of theatres by uniting them, which considerably reduced their number of staff. A new state order defined the number of new productions. These changes, including the closure of the Opera and Ballet Theatre and the Stage Circus Centre, were presented as a rejection of forms of culture which do not correspond with Turkmen traditions, and a return to national roots. This is how it came across in Niyazov's speech: "… There are people among us that prefer music of foreign composers … of course, who would argue, we need the classics as well. But leave that to the connoisseurs. We are Turkmen and have our own national music, and that should be given the first priority…".[9] However, Niyazov's successor, the new Turkmen president K.Berdymuhammedov, has brought these institutions back, taking into account pressure from the international community.

The authorities were compelled to retain the entire cultural infrastructure of the Soviet period, but stopped investing in its modernisation, its development, or maintainence of its former social function. Almost all the cultural institutions moved to operating independently with very weak control from the state. Many cultural assets, production and exhibition areas, and social infrastructure passed into the full possession of officials and were used – sometimes legally, sometimes illegally – for the obtaining of personal income and for the independent maintainence of these institutions in working condition.

Many "houses of culture"[10] and "palaces of culture" in the region were closed, their equipment sold, and the buildings privatised and used for commercial purposes. Book publishing and the [book] trade significantly contracted. At the beginning of the 1990s the print runs of books sharply fell (and this tendency has remained); and the retail prices increased dramatically. As a result new books became more or less unaffordable, and most trade in books in the 1990s went through the second-hand bookshops (where Russian-speaking emigrants disposed of their home libraries). Consequently, the basic source of reading matter was ageing printed materials. Since the beginning of this decade, there has been an increase in the import of Russian books, mostly light reading and educational literature; also the retail prices of Russian books are very high in relation to the average purchasing capacity of the Central Asian population. Whereas at the end of the Soviet period almost all of the Central Asian republics had specialised bookshops for books in European languages, nowadays such bookshops do not exist, and the practice of buying books online is not yet developed. The development, in recent years, of

[9] C.M.Demidov, *Post-Soviet Turkmenistan*. Moscow: Natalis, 2002, page 114.
[10] *Transl. note* "House of culture" and "Palace of culture": types of community centre established in Soviet times differing in their scale and in the range of classes, clubs, etc on offer.

opportunities to access literature via the Internet has partly compensated for this deficit, but as will be demonstrated, this kind of reading is accessible to a rather limited group of the population.

The library system took a heavy hit. In the absence of funding for the purchase of new books from abroad and the decline in local book publishing, library stock did not get replenished with modern literature; as well as this, these stocks were frequently reduced due to deterioration in storage conditions, and the sale of some units by library staff. In Uzbekistan, a considerable part of [library] stocks were destroyed in accordance with a government order to dispose of books and magazines that had the word "socialist" in them or other Soviet features; and since 2006, as part of the library system reform, "integration" of libraries has been taking place, with the resulting closure of a number of town and regional libraries, the buildings given over to private enterprises.

Commercialization of the mass media has led to a sharp decline in the coverage of cultural news and events coverage in the media. The quality of this component has also changed: the "elite", "prestigious" genres, which dominated in the late Soviet period have almost completely disappeared: classical concerts, opera and ballet, theatre productions and television plays, literary evenings, special educational programs for schoolchildren, etc. Even where broadcasting is closely controlled by the state, the bulk of "cultural" information is made up of traditional genres.

As my anonymous Turkmen correspondent commented, "The retrogression is so obvious and the stagnation is on such a large scale, that even a hypothetical change of the power paradigm could not revive the dried-up tree of national culture. Its likely fate is to be partially preserved in ethnographic museums, or to be completely relegated into some global exhibition of curiosities - if you consider the bizarre forms that the older kinds of traditional creative production, including folk crafts, have degenerated into, under the powerful pressure of totalitarian ideology… The personal goals of any cultural worker, in the situation described above, are reduced to either emigration (including internal emigration) or to survival by any accessible means … The majority of the intelligentsia have either changed their occupation, or have adapted to cater for the current tastes and demands of the main customer – the state. But this path has no future, since it is oriented exclusively towards [short-term] opportunism. The creative process is replaced by its imitation, and an ersatz-art emerges, which is quite satisfactory for the demands of the day, but absolutely incapable of saying anything new, or even of maintaining the level of professionalism which had been achieved by the 80s of the last century".

Culture and the crisis in education

Problems of cultural development are extremely intimately related to problems in education. The modern Central Asian states have inherited from the Soviet period a system of continual training in cultural disciplines (literature, arts, music, etc.) through primary, secondary and higher school; an infrastructure of extra curricular activities (children's centres of creative arts, amateur performance competitions), and also a network of secondary and higher education institutions specialising in preparing young people for professional activity in the cultural sphere.

All of this system was preserved, by inertia, in the independent nation-states, which did not decide upon a radical rejection [of the existing system] - although the ideological necessity of such an infrastructure for these states appears somewhat unclear.

What is more, in several countries this system has even been expanded. For example, in Kyrgizstan the number of higher education institutions has quadrupled. In Uzbekistan the number of students in the cultural sphere (art and cinematography) in specialist secondary education institutions numbered 25,000 in 2006-7 (2.5% of all students). The number of specialised educational institutions in this sphere has grown more than one and a half times since 2001 (from 21 to 35), and the number of students has grown three and a half times (from 7.1 to 25 thousand students) [11]. This can be explained to a large extent by the general demographic growth in the population and the corresponding growth in the number of school-leavers. The transition of part of the education system to a fee-paying (contractual) basis has also stimulated many educational establishments to widen both the services they offer and the number of students. This, however, has often led to a fall in educational standards and teaching possibilities.

Nevertheless, as a whole, the financing and prestige of these kinds of establishment has fallen and the quality of tuition has deteriorated. One reason for this, apart from the low salaries of tutors and the resulting 'brain drain' of qualified teaching professionals, is the sharp fall in the status accorded to the "graduate specialist". A good education has ceased to be seen as a guarantee of prestigious or even adequately salaried

> Of course, our university is in a special position, being both state-financed and sometimes supported by international organisations. But speaking in general, we're in an obvious crisis. More than half of the teaching staff are of pensionable age. The older generation are working out their final years before their pension and the younger are not aspiring to replace them because of the low salaries. The money that that fee-paying students pay is always going up, and from year to year the number of free places is shrinking. The library [stock] is almost never updated. The hours for specialised subjects are being reduced in favour of increases in general studies and 'ideological' subjects.
> **M.A. University tutor, Tashkent**

n *Uzbekistan: a statistical handbook.* UNDP, 2007

work. On the other hand, getting a genuine quality education, even where tuition is free, entails ever-increasing indirect expenses – on the acquisition of books for study, supplementary lessons on a fee-paying basis, etc. A good education is becoming more and more costly, and less and less a worthwhile "investment", increasingly affordable only for very well-off people, or those who hope to recoup their investment by working abroad. Many educational institutions frequently do not have a proper foundation for supplying a quality education; there has been a significant increase, especially in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, in corruption and bribery in the education system. A lack of private colleges and universities in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, rigid administrative control and the indoctrination of students in state institutions also accelerate the processes of stagnation in the sphere of education.

Another negative factor in the development of culture has been that permanent links with Russia and other regions of the former USSR have broken down. In Soviet times, emigrants from Central Asia had the opportunity, with state support, to improve their qualifications in the educational institutions of Moscow, Saint Petersburg and other cities, and this included constant exchanges of specialists between the central Asian republics themselves. Those professions which did not have local specialists were filled by immigrants from beyond the borders of central Asia. After the collapse of the USSR, standards in the entire educational system fell sharply and many specialists found themselves without their own educational base. In Tajikistan and Kyrgizstan, there are Russian universities, in Uzbekistan, affiliates of Moscow higher educations institutions, but despite Russian [state] finance, the teaching is done by local professionals to local standards. In Uzbekistan and Kyrgizstan there are also small Western universities, but these are accessible only to a narrow elite group of students. The number of students gaining the opportunity to study abroad – on scholarships or self-financing – is extremely insignificant and covers only a few fields (usually economics, law and the social sciences). Apart from that, many who study abroad remain abroad. This can be explained by the fact that the governmental organs, as a rule, do not give preferential treatment to graduates of Western universities in recruitment or career advancement (in the way that in the Soviet Union, a degree from a Russian higher educational institution gave its holder the "green light" to a successful career).

Overall, together with a general fall in educational standards, the humanitarian sciences sector has shrunk [in relation to the whole]. For children and adolescents, the cultural sphere has ceased to be prestigious, and no longer provides a good career or life prospects. The general atmosphere pushes youth towards those professions in which it is possible to earn a good salary or gain access to the resources of power.[12] The education system in the countries of central Asia does not turn out the

[12] *Transl. note:* it is ambiguous if this means becoming *part* of a powerful elite, or if it refers to gaining access to some (financial?) resources accruing from *access* to that elite.

professionals needed to ensure the continuing existence of certain cultural institutions, and some whole fields of culture in the new national frameworks.

Culture and language

One of the basic tendencies in cultural processes has been the gradual derussification of the political and cultural space of central Asia, which began from the moment that the "titular" languages of the nations were proclaimed as the state languages. This process proceeds in different countries to different degrees of intensity and with different levels of support from the authorities.

In Kazakhstan and Kyrgizstan, and also amongst the capital and urban populations of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the Russian language holds its position to this day – not only amongst Russian and Russian-speaking inhabitants, but amongst representatives of the locally originating, local elite. The Russian language remains an important factor in obtaining a good education, highly-paid work, and high social status. The Russian language, even without having formal support, preserves an important position in the sphere of science and in the cultural field.

Table 6. Numbers of population with Russian language in the states of central Asia. (2004, thousands of people) [13]

State	Total population	Numbers of active Russian speakers				Numbers with passive knowledge of Russian	Numbers not knowing Russian
		Total		Amongst the total, those considering themselves Russian			
		'000s	% of total population	'000s	% of total population		
Kazakhstan	15 100	10 000	66	4 200	27	2 300	2 800
Kyrgyzstan	5 000	1 500	30	600	12	2 000	1 500
Tajikistan	6 300	1 000	16	90	1,5	2 000	3 300
Turkmenistan	4 800	150	3	100	2	900	3 800
Uzbekistan	25 000	5 000	20	1 200	5	10 000	10 000
Total	56 200	17 650	31,5	6 190	11	17 200	21400

Nevertheless, the system of Russian teaching is gradually starting to decline, and the sphere of its practical usage is gradually being constricted. The current process has a whole range of

How can we talk about the preservation and development of Russian, if the Russian-speaking population in Uzebekistan is rapidly ageing because such a large proportion of Russian-speaking youth is aspiring to leave the country?
Z.V. Teacher, National University of Uzbekistan.

-31 December 2006, p86.

consequences. An impenetrable barrier has arisen between the Russian-speaking and non-Russian-speaking population: the former group ceasing to exert an influence on the latter, and he latter [group] in their turn demanding more and more that the authorities and elites speak in the local languages. Secular and European culture, which for many decades was cultivated amongst the population with the help of the Russian language, has become less accessible to the majority of people; the range of opportunities, and access to information and knowledge, is decreasing.

Apart from this, considerable damage has been brought upon existing culturo-linguistic and educational mechanisms by hasty and poorly worked-out declarations regarding the translation of the national languages to the Roman alphabet in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Although the initial romanisation of the alphabet was conceived as a 'Western' project – it was recorded, for example in the Uzbek law on its introduction, as "directed at the creation of favourable conditions to hasten the overall progress of the republic and its entry into the system of world communications" [14] – in fact it has had quite the opposite effect. A significant body of literature translated from European languages, published [both] in Russian and in 'Cyrillic' Uzbek and Turkmen languages has become less and less accessible to students since the process of transition to the Roman alphabet. One can often hear complaints about the complexity of written communication between different generations – youth up to 25 years old, able to write only in the Roman alphabet, and representatives of the middle-aged and older generations, who continue to use Cyrillic. Such difficulties are settled, in general, at the expense of youth [having to] master – together with the Roman alphabet – the Cyrillic as well.

Culture and ethnic minorities

The national framework of ideology in which the culture of the central Asian states exists, has made it difficult for ethnic minorities to practice their own cultures, differing as they do (in language, religion, etc) from the [cultures of the] 'titular' nations. They have lost their political and official status, even in the case of minorities that number millions of people and form a quarter of citizens (for example, Russians in

> In my view, traditional national culture in these countries is supplanting - and will fairly rapidly completely and finally supplant - all the remnants of Russian culture brought to central Asia via Russian policy and Russian language. And this means those European 'beginnings' which were also absorbed into Russian culture from the West. This process will be more gradual in Kazakhstan – [as] there are very many Russians and other nationalities, the representatives of which traditionally choose Russian as a language of international communication.
> **Lilia Kapaus, book publisher, Kazakhstan**

[14] Preamble to the law "On the introduction of an Uzbek alphabet, based on roman script", 2 September 1993

Kazakhstan). The only form of legitimation of their existence is in "national-cultural associations" that do not receive any significant support from the state. Only in Kazakhstan is their status slightly higher - a "Congress of Nations". In Uzbekistan, there has survived from the Soviet period the autonomous region of Karakalpak, which has independent pseudo-governmental institutions.

Cultural practices amongst the ethnic minorities have passed into the private sector and consequently under the influence of private enterprises, international organizations and individual enthusiasts. This has allowed them to be free of ideological control and management, to evolve more spontaneously and to react more flexibly to the demands of the market. On the whole, representatives of ethnic minorities don't suffer from any serious discrimination in the realization of their cultural rights. As sociological research conducted on this problem in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has shown, over a half of respondents, representatives of ethnic minorities, confirmed that their "right to culture" was satisfactorily met (52 % in Tajikistan, 52.5% in Kazakhstan, and 63.7 % in Kyrgyzstan) [15]. On the question of "what concrete measures could promote cultural development amongst ethnic minorities?" (Table 7), the opinions of representatives of ethnic minorities were divided (table 7) [16].

Table 7. "What concrete measures could contribute to cultural development amongst ethnic minorities?"

	Kyrgizstan	Kazakhstan	Tajikistan
Opportunity to learn and speak their native language	24,68%	14,67%	18,20%
Opportunity to spread awareness of their culture	19,19%	10,67%	22,20%
Support of customs and traditions	26,61%	37,00%	16,20%
Increase in ethnic minority media and its production in their own language	14,68%	12,33%	23,80%
State support of national-cultural centres	13,06%	22,00%	32%

Nevertheless, the complete or partial withering away of the state infrastructures of guarantees and supports, [both] explicit and implicit pressure from the authorities, the narrow space which is offered to ethnic minorities in the public and official sphere do represent discriminatory factors. The national cultural societies, created with the sanction of the authorities, have a clear tendency to be moulded into an instrument of ideological and administrative manipulation by the state. For example, in Uzbekistan, all the national cultural centres have to be "co-ordinated" by the so-called Republican

[15] See: "Report of the regional project 'Monitoring of the maintenance of the rights of national minorities and an analysis of their participation in social-political, socio-economic and cultural life in the countries of central Asia'". OF "Central Asia: Peace and accord"; OF "IRET"; "Community and development". Astana, 2005.
[16] ibid.

International Cultural Centre (RICC) – a kind of ministry for ethnic minority affairs. Existing outside the mechanism of state control and surveillance of the activities of the national-cultural centres, and having the status of an NGO (which in theory excludes subordination to any governmental organ) RICC is very effective in mobilising these centres for different events, festivals and so on, organised to demonstrate the idea of "multi-ethnic accord" in contemporary Uzbekistan. One example is the festival "Uzbekistan: our common home".

The cultural marketplace

High levels of poverty and a rather low index of human development - with the exception, to some extent, of Kazakhstan - (Table 8) creates an unfavourable background for the existence of a professionalised cultural sphere based on self-financing and business projects.

Table 8. Index of Human Development (IHD) in the countries of the region[17]

Country	Position on the IHD (out of 177 countries)	IHD	GDP index	Index of life expectancy	Index of education
Kazakhstan	80	0,761	0,70	0,64	0,94
Kyrgyzstan	111	0,694	0,48	0,69	0,91
Tajikistan	122	0,652	0,40	0,64	0,91
Turkmenistan	97	0,738	0,68	0,62	0,91
Uzbekistan	109	0,702	0,48	0,70	0,93

Low living standards and insignificant purchasing capacity create an obstacle for the consumption of cultural production in a free market without state financial support. Where this support is absent, secular and professionally-produced culture is affordable only to a very narrow group of well-educated people, on medium and high incomes; at the same time, the majority of the population, outside the capitals and cities, have found themselves cut off from secular and professionally-produced culture. In these cases, cultural needs are satisfied by local [cultural] practices and, partly, by television.

As the income of the region's population in the region grows, linked to an increase in GDP and labour-force migration, there is a [corresponding] increase in attendance in cultural institutions, such as museums, theatres and cinemas. For instance, in Kazakhstan, cinema attendance grew from 1999 to

[17] *Source*: "Report on human development in Central Asia. To a future without barriers: regional co-operation in the field of human development and the provision of personal security". (UNDP, 2005.)

2006 from a few thousand to five million a year, and a further significant increases are predicted[12]. The use of other cultural services has been growing, and for the emerging middle class this has become a symbolic demonstration of their social status. Nevertheless, this process is of an ambiguous nature and mainly affects the urban Russian speaking population. A significant part of the population, with not such a high level of education, and cut off from cultural institutions, would rather invest in conspicuous consumption, such as family feasts (that is to say, the use of local and religious cultural practices to demonstrate and maintain their social status).

Secular, European-style culture is a status symbol for young people studying in the higher educational institutions in the Central Asian capitals and cities. After receiving a higher education, many young people return to their home towns and villages, bringing with them some of the fashions of the capitals and urban cultural practices, which then enter into competition with the local, rural, and religious culture. In Soviet times this kind of dissemination of secular and urban culture in society was actively supported and encouraged by the state. The current authorities of the independent states ignore these processes.

One part of the consumer-base for Central Asian cultural production consists of foreigners: tourists and the staff of international organisations or embassies. In this connection, a large number of manufacturers, in both the private and state sectors, are oriented towards the needs and spending power of foreign customers, as they select and price their goods and services. As the head of the culture desk of a national Turkmen newspaper commented: "Today, modernisation in the cultural system requires research-based outlooks and cultural marketing. And from [accepting the need for] marketing it does not take long to recognise that culture can take the status of a competitive product, which can be actively exported; we can export our uniqueness, difference in mentality, creative originality and the distinctive artistic traditions that are expressed in [our] works of art and other cultural products. Indeed, we have had, for a long time now, such well-known global "brands" as [our] carpets, jewellery, ancient monuments, etc." Nevertheless, apart from Uzbekistan, where the ancient historic monuments are situated, the tourist business is poorly developed. In Kyrgizstan and Tajikistan, mountain tourism is developed, but it is not directly related to culture.

Private enterprise, the non-governmental sector and culture

One of the fundamental changes in post-Soviet times has been the fact that in the 1990s, private enterprise became one of the main players in the economic and political life of Central Asian society.

The relations between private enterprise and culture are of a complex nature. Local private businesses feel a certain "cultural hunger", that is, a shortage of ways to satisfy their cultural needs, raise their social status and legitimate their capital in society. That compels many business people to finance cultural projects as part of a wider social-charitable programme. For example, in Kyrgizstan, AsiaUniversalBank is involved in cultural projects, including the provision of support to state cultural institutions (museums, theatres, etc.); the [bank's] management see a connection between this philanthropic activity and their work with potential clients. In the cultural sphere, apart from banks, communication providers, mass media companies, air companies, also work actively: enterprises that deal with a mass consumer base, including foreigners.

However, private entrepreneurs still don't know how to work with the [general] population, with cultural professionals and with cultural institutions, preferring to prioritise personal contacts and tastes over than long-term institutional projects. In business circles, there is a total lack of business ethics, and culture is not seen as a symbol of status and prestige. Many cultural projects financed by business are directed at the establishment of relationships with governmental organs, and appear as a form of tax.

Cultural professionals are themselves are not well-prepared to co-operate efficiently with business people; they do not know how to set up business projects and plans, and cannot argue their position. Cultural professionals do not trust business, seeing a danger that commercialization may damage their cultural work, and they do not feel comfortable with pressure and control from private business.

In the nineties, along with private enterprise, there appeared in Central Asian society a large sector of non-governmental organisations that are often perceived as "civil society" [groups]. In the various countries, the development of this sector has had its own peculiarities: it hardly exists at all in Turkmenistan; in Uzbekistan, in the middle of the current decade, the sector was put under total state control and almost ceased to exist; in Tajikistan, non-governmental organisations began to develop only after some time had elapsed; only in Kazakhstan and Kyrgizstan does this sector take on its most fully-developed form.

[Employment in] the non-governmental sector is, to a large part, a means of survival for a large section of the workforce who have not found themselves a position in the wider job market. Through [the non-governmental sector], many people have entered the cultural sphere, who have no professional connection with culture. The presence of a large quantity of grants, projects and initiatives, in no way co-ordinated with each other, does permit many cultural institutions to be maintained - in a "semi-

surviving" condition - but despite this, they create a situation of chaos, and sometimes false values and false "[cultural] authorities". The big resources that pass through the NGOs [often] turn out to be frittered away on insignificant cultural events, and often are senselessly and totally wasted, or even embezzled.

In summary, the activity of private enterprise and non-governmental organisations may be striking and effective in individual cases, but does not lead to any visible, fundamental influence on society as a whole: its customs, values and practices.

Culture and religion: the influence of re-islamisation processes

In the 1990s, religion had an ever-increasing influence on cultural processes in Central Asia, mostly Islam, which is the main faith and identity for the majority of the region's population.

In the Soviet era, as already mentioned above, the role of religious practice was reduced to a minimum. The main religious institutions (madrassas, mosques, sharia courts, *vakufs* [land and estates belonging to the mosque], and so on) were almost completely dismantled, the religious elite were suppressed; the tradition of passing on religious knowledge was practically broken. The individual mosques and religious organisations that were officially preserved in the region had a very limited influence on people. At the same time, some religious practices were preserved amongst the population, particularly in rural areas.

Since the end of the 1980s, and especially in the 1990s, an increased interest in religion has been evident in society. From one side, the authorities of the Central Asian states themselves have given legal status to many religious elements within the frameworks of their national ideologies. Many [religious] festivals have been given the status of national holidays: Eid-al-Fitr, Eid-al-Adkha, Navruz [spring equinox] (which in mass consciousness is associated with Islam), monuments of Islamic architecture are being restored and rebuilt, and many religious works have been published. From another side, Central Asian society has been opened up to the rest of the Muslim world, with which links had been severed for several decades. Religious organisations, missionaries, literature, and money have penetrated into the region. All these factors, aggregated against the background of an identity crisis after the collapse of the USSR, have led to a growth in religious faith, the extensive spread of religious practices (prayer, fasting, ritual offering) and other trappings (the hijab), even an identifiable fashion for religion. It is clear that in each separate country and in different regions these tendencies look rather different. The greatest religious "boom" has taken place in Uzbekistan (especially the Fergana Valley), Tajikistan, Turkmenistan,

and the southern regions of Kazakhstan and Kyrgizstan, where a significant number of Uzbeks and Uigurs live.

The process of re-islamisation is already taking place on a massive scale and will undoubtedly have far-reaching consequences for the whole of Central Asia, including on cultural processes. Within society customs and behavioural stereotypes are taking root, which do not aspire towards an interest in secular, European (including Russian) and urban culture. On top of this, amongst some groups of the more faithful (groups having a strong influence on the rest) there is emerging a sharp aversion to, and denial of, these cultural forms. This [development] is receiving increasing support in society as a whole.

Apart from that, with the appearance (or wider spread of existing) neo-Protestant Christian movements (and, to a lesser extent, the Hare Krishna movement) many of which prosyletise amongst the traditionally Islamic ethnic groups, there has been an intensification of conflict between these movements and Islamic institutions: in this [conflict], the state, as a rule, supports the latter. Essentially, non-islamic religions enjoy tolerant attitudes, up to the point where they do not enter into the zone of the traditional institutions, [challenging] their world-view and their conservative politics. In conditions of gradual social, economic and cultural stagnation, protestant denominations with their "capitalist spirit" and overall orientation towards Western values, are likely to elicit some kind of cultural aversion.

The influence of globalisation and international cultural networks

Beyond the obvious isolationist tendencies in the Central Asian states (an intensification of closedness as a counterweight to openness,[18] centralisation of power – including cultural – as a counterbalance to decentralisation, strengthening of traditionalism, etc.) in the mid-1990s, Central Asian society became more open to the outside world in comparison with Soviet times. Most significantly, this was seen in the acceleration and facilitation of the flow of informational, human and other resources into the region (and out of the region) and also, to a lesser extent, between the countries of the region.

At the same time it is worth mentioning straight away that the influences of globalisation was different in different countries of the region, as between different regions and sociocultural groups within each country. So, the strongest processes of globalisation have been felt in Kazakhstan, the weakest in

[18] This is the literal translation, but *intensification of the closed society as a reaction against tendencies leading to greater openness* appears to be the idea.

Turkmenistan; within each country the most globalised [parts], as in other countries of the world, are the capitals and larger urban centres, and the urban elites. In a cross-section of age groups, representatives of younger groups (in their 20s and 30s) are better able to utilise the new opportunities, and at the same time for the older generation it is significantly more difficult to adapt to the [new] cultural and informational-technological challenges. Finally, in an *ethnic* cross-section the groups [most influenced by globalisation] are: bilingual, russified representatives of the titular nations and the Russian national minority, who have managed to relatively quickly supplement Russian language (the lingua franca of the Soviet period) with English and other international languages. In other words, the comparative openness of borders for movement and information flow, in the conditions of Central Asia, mean there is a distinct chance for a significant part of the former Soviet cultural elite, forced out of the cultural field by new elites and in flight from the contraction of the secular space.

The most important signifiers of globalisation, in its cultural aspect, for Central Asia have been:

- The appearance and activities of foreign/international funds – in the first place the Soros Fund, the British Council, The F.Ebert Fund, the Swiss Development Agency, etc. Also, UNESCO (whose activities, however, reflect a pre-globalisation philosophy, oriented towards the support of governmental cultural initiatives);
- Connection into global information networks: in the 1990s via satellite and cable TV channels, and since the end of the 1990s, via the development of the Internet;
- An active process of cultural exchange and international tours, exhibitions, education overseas, migration and foreign tourism. The intensification of processes of labour-force migration since the end of the 1990s have begun to gradually - although not [yet] very noticeably - to change the cultural stereotypes and preferences of a significant part of the titular population of the Central Asian states.

Globalisation vs. the nation-state. Despite the lack of any equivalent to the anti-globalisation movement in Central Asia, it is possible to note a certain reaction against the cultural influence of globalisation, at least from two players – the upper echelon of the political and administrative elite and also from the religious elite. Government officials at the highest level are attempting to minimise, as far as possible, "cultural globalisation", as they see it largely as a challenge, and even a threat:

- to their nation-building strategies, which exploit images and symbols of their own state/people as the source of the main cultural ideas: by comparison with the "cultural package" of globalisation in its pluralistic variation, these nation-building dogmas reflect only one of many exotic and provincial "little worlds";

- to their control over the informational and cultural space, chiefly their attempts to make this space, as far as possible, under [the control of] censorship, and impermeable;
- to the cultural status-quo in society (fearing that over-hasty, uncontrolled cultural changes inspired by globalisation could cause, [in their turn,] political shifts).

As a representative of the Ministry of Culture of Tajikistan stated: "Globalisation, although it has positive aspects, throws down a challenge, first of all [a challenge to] national identity. That is, support of traditional forms of culture is linked with the search for our own identity and its defence against globalisation. This will allow Tajikistan to preserve its own "face".[19]

Finally, it is worth taking into account the fact that most of the "upper echelon" of politicians in the countries of central Asia are members of the older generation, inclined to perceive cultural globalisation as a version of late-Soviet "cultural exchange" (i.e. familiarisation with the "progressive" cultures of foreign countries in strictly measured doses). [Their] attitudes to the spread of the Internet, networks of international NGOs, migration networks and so on, is rarely to see them as positive developments: chiefly because, for these elites, these are new and incomprehensible phenomena, and they have no knowledge, experience or desire to administrate them [effectively], maximising their advantages whilst minimising problems and expense. International contacts sanctioned by the state – when they are not motivated by political pragmatism – continue to be perceived in Soviet terms as "incentives", "rewards for loyalty" and even the receipt of additional revenues (travel expenses, grants) rather than a process natural to the period of globalisation. In some countries – Uzbekistan and Turkemistan – these controls take the strictest of forms (although before 2004-5, Uzbekistan granted international organisations a great deal more freedom). In countries like Kazakhstan, and particularly Kyrgizstan and Tajikistan, international organisations operate more independently. However, the general tendency in the Central Asian states – though not an irreversible one – is limitation of the activities of international organisations and the restoration of state control over them.

As for the religious elites - both the official ones, and also, to a large degree, the unofficial ones – they have taken a stance against cultural globalisation based on a rejection of secular and Western values unacceptable to religious understanding. As well as these [elites], in Central Asian, operate (sometimes semi-legally, sometimes illegally) a religious network of organisations

[19] *Transl. note:* with the idea of preserving a *unique identity* rather than the other meaning of 'face-saving' (avoiding embarrassment).

and people who [are connected to] international Islamic[20] organisations and groups. These provide alternatives to Western sources of finance and ideas.

Globalisation vs. cultural regionalism. Another specific aspect of the cultural influence of globalisation in Central Asia is the lack of pan-regional alternatives to this process. Essentially, there is no perception of the region as a cultural whole. The majority of attempts at general, Central Asian cultural integration run up against not only the impossibility of finding a single model, acceptable to all states in the region (for example, the image of "Turkestan", exaggerated in the mid-1990s, was unacceptable to Tajikistan), but also the obvious primacy of disparate national cultural mythologies over unified, pan-regional ideas. As a result, the majority of regional cultural initiatives (in the fields of literature, art, and so on) were maintained, and in some cases initiated, by foreign funds.

Cultural contacts and exchanges between the countries of the regions are rather weak; information about culture and cultural events in the other states of the region are not broadcast in the mass media; there is no mass media with a regional reach to elucidate common themes.

The "cultural marketplaces" of the countries of Central Asia (in the sense of "commodity [markets]") remain oriented, as in Soviet times, towards sale – and accordingly, to cultural import[21] – outside the boundaries of the region. A basic item of cultural "export" is exotica – the architecture of ancient cities (most characteristic for Uzbekistan), relics of nomadic existence (for Kazakhstan and Kyrgizstan), and "ecological tourism" (in Kyrgizstan and Tajikistan). Accordingly, the chief regions for export are the USA and Western Europe, Russia, and parts of Turkey (for Tajikistan, also Iran). The movement of cultural products between countries within the region is rather insignificant and linked more to the exchange of cultural products within self-contained social and ethnic groups. The exceptions are a few spheres of mass culture – pop music and cinema - which are propagated amongst different social and cultural classes, even bypassing national borders. For example, we can note the popularity of Uzbek and Kazakh pop music, and also Uzbek cinema in Kyrgizstan and Tajikistan.

[20] *Transl. note:* this should possibly be *Islamist*, considering the political implications of 'semi-legally', 'illegally'.
[21] *Transl. note:* this is the literal translation from the original text, but *export* seems to make more sense?

Attempts to establish and develop regional links, adjust the cultural dialogue to different, non-governmental foundations run up against powerful obstacles: inter-state borders, the visa system, impoverished intelligentsia, state control and surveillances of the movements of creative workers (in certain countries of the region) and so on. In addition, many noticeable differences have already arisen in many spheres of life – in politics, economics, and ideology.
Alexandr Dzhumaev. "Can we find ourselves in the current of change?" ***Druzhba Narodov*****, 2008. No.4.**

The influence of external players (the USA, Western Europe, Russia and others). In the continuing situation of rivalry – sometimes subsiding, sometimes intensifying – between great powers in central Asia, the influence of cultural globalisation will be to a significant degree conditioned by the 'cultural investments' of these powers in the region.

Although for the main players, their presence in the regions is linked to geopolitical and economic interests; it does not mean that cultural investment should be seen only as calculated philanthropy, camouflaging *realpolitik*, or as a form of concealed cultural expansionism. A perception of this kind, alas, has become rather widespread, particularly since the "colour" revolutions[22], which generated a surge of conspiracy theories not only amongst the authoritarian elites of the region, but amongst parts of the expert community in Central Asia.

In the case of Western players, and particularly the USA, there is a clear attempt to use cultural investments not only to 'fortify' their influence in the region, but also to disseminate within it pluralistic and multi-cultural values and a culture of debate. A large part of the cultural production which comes from the West to Central Asia – as to other countries of the third world – arrives 'spontaneously', through mass media, cinema, fashion, and so on. Apart from that, significant investments go through government programmes, or through non-governmental (including international) funds. The main cultural donor in this group remains the USA, although in two states of the region today this has been reduced to a bare minimum – in Turkmenistan, and in 2004-5 – Uzebekistan[23]. Amongst other Western countries, supporting cultural and educational events – either through embassies or through different funds – we can identify Great Britain (the British Council), France (Alliance Francaise, and the French Institute for the Study of Central Asia), Germany (Goethe-Institut, the F. Ebert Fund), Switzerland (The Swiss Development Bureau), not to mention a large number of smaller funds and projects. In Tajikistan, Kyrgizstan and Kazakhstan the Aga Khan Development Network also operates, which aggregates the resources of many Western organisations.

[22] I.e. the 'orange' revolution in Ukraine and 'rose' revolution in Georgia.
[23] In fact, even after the departure of almost all American organisations from Uzbekistan, the USA continues to provide certain support towards the development of libraries, and the provision of grants to Uzbek students and researchers to study and train in the USA.

Despite the undoubtedly positive character of the work of Western national and international organisations in various projects in Central Asia, as a whole it would be impossible to say that in the past 17 years, the situation in culture has changed for the better, or shown any tendency towards such improvement. Negative processes – the destruction of schools, the disappearance of whole sectors [of culture], the archaicisation and desecularisation of consciousness, isolationism, etc, are continuing to gather force. As one anonymous expert in Kyrgizstan cynically remarked: "Western funds organise their support of cultural projects around the leisure of their own employees." In the words of an[other] anonymous correspondent from Turkmenistan: "Unfortunately, international organisations, despite their good intentions and their attempts to establish a system of grants (for the realisation of cultural events, preservation of cultural heritage, organisation of trips abroad for creative collectives, exchanges of cultural specialists in different fields, for study and for training), tend to [carry out their aims] in an exceptionally formal way[24] and miss their objectives. On the one hand their support compensates for the lack of attention to such problems from the government. On the other hand, in recent years, the futility of the efforts of international organisations to advance culture in Turkmenistan has become obvious. Firstly, they most often have to deal with a new generation of poorly educated people, incompetent even in their own fields [of expertise]. This means that the resources of grants, distributed, for example, for the preservation of cultural heritage, leads rather to the spoiling of that heritage, since the recipients are not in a position to reach competent solutions to the specific tasks they have irresponsibly taken on. Secondly, people who, thanks to foreign assistance, gain skills and experience abroad, do not get opportunities to fully realise their potential in their native land, where they come up against attitudes bearing little resemblance to the West and even to Russia. What works successfully there does not work at all here. That is the reason why international organisations cannot play a role in the advancement of culture in Turkmenistan, and neither can the state. This is also hindered by the systemic nature of the permanent crisis, which revealed itself soon after the collapse of the USSR and is now inexorably leading to the spread of the comprehensive degradation of the former Russian colony".

One can also see the various agencies and programmes of the UN, and their activities in all of the Central Asian states, as envoys of Western cultural influence. Although, with the exception of UNESCO, they are not involved in the support of cultural initiatives, at the same time a number of events, organised by these organisations within the rubric of 'awareness-raising' – photo-competitions, documentaries, theatrical productions – also appear to be a rather noticeable channel for cultural investment. However, the UN, and UNESCO in particular, works most of all with the authorities,

[24] This refers to applying, in a bureaucratic way, 'one size fits all' solutions, rather than adapting to local needs.

legitimising and reinforcing those views on culture and cultural processes which are formulated within the official ideology.

The cultural presence of Russia, intensifying since the beginning of the new century, is mainly directed at preserving the role of Russian language and Russian culture. The main cultural activity is carried out by the Embassy and *Rosszarubezhtsentr* [the Russian Foreign Centre].

The "Institute for Eurasian Studies" (a Russian state development fund) has been active since 2005 in all the states of Central Asia, with the exception of Turkmenistan. The most noticeable cultural initiative of the fund has been the organisation of the "Russian Prize" competition for the best literary work written in Russian by a citizen of the former Soviet states. The main activity of the fund in the Central Asian states have been linked to the support and dissemination of publications in Russian, specifically "Russian language and literature in schools" (Tajikistan, Kyrgizstan) and *Russia Today*, a digest of the Russian press; and the support of educational establishments, awarding of grants, etc.

In various cultural institutions (museums, theatres, etc.) within Russian, professional associations of cultural workers (for example, the Union of Theatre Professionals) maintain centres and departments supporting links with the former Soviet republics. However, this activity is based on previous personal relationships and the enthusiasm of individuals, and does not have a long-term, financial-institutional character. Russia continues to maintain a fairly strong influence through its television, press, and literature, which are widely available to the population of Central Asia, but it is the most negative features of contemporary Russian culture that are disseminated through these channels: light entertainment genres and disposable 'mass culture'.

On the whole, despite the widening and diversification of its cultural investment in the region, Russia is not in a position yet to appear as an alternative cultural donor (to the countries of the West). The procedures involved in cultural co-operation with Russian institutions are more bureaucratic and opaque than in their western equivalents. On top of this, these organisations rarely support independent cultural initiatives, preferring to maintain more low-risk and semi-official 'relationships' complying with local state structures.

The countries of the Near and Middle East exert a definite, and not insignificant, influence on the culture of the countries of Central Asia, primarily Turkey and Iran. They finance many projects, carry out joint actions, put resources into education and the cultural infrastructure, and organise reciprocal exhibition tours and exchange visits. This influence is particularly noticeable in Turkemenistan and Tajikistan. [Finally,] Japan is involved in occasional cultural projects.

Migration, tourism and culture. Tourism and migration are important channels for the population of Central Asia to become acquainted with the culture of other countries. After the collapse of the USSR, the trans-national movement of people took on a mass character. The Central Asian states made these processes reasonably open: restrictions on leaving the country (internal visas) exist only in Turkmenia and to some extent in Uzbekistan. At the same time, tourist visits to the countries of Europe, the USA or the other countries of Asia are available only to a comparatively wealthy section of the population – as a rule, the urban and the remaining Russian-speaking population.

Table 9. Number of tourists travelling out of Kazakhstan, 2002-2007 [25]

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
	74728	94692	154885	210692	255692	286691

In the first decade of the century, a massive labour migration has begun out of Kyrgizstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the majority of which has flowed to Russia and Kazakhstan, and to a lesser extent to South Korea, Turkey, the countries of the Persian Gulf, and Europe. The number of these migrants totals several million and consists mainly of rural dwellers, with a poor knowledge of Russian, a poor education, and accustomed to local and religious [cultural] practices. National-cultural societies in the host countries are beginning to work with these migrants, teaching them the language, familiarising them with social norms and new cultural practices. This process is currently at a very early stage and its outcomes are not very well-studied, and not very clear. Sociologists note especially the influence of labour-force migration on the urbanisation of the rural population and the replacement of general, collective values with individual [values] and the transformation of gender stereotypes. In the words of one Tajik official, "returning, they [migrants] bring with them a part of another culture". Apart from this, external labour-force migration, the majority of which is to Russia, is conducive to the preservation and even a definite strengthening in the position of Russian language in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgizstan, the countries with the most emigrants.

> Most of all, I like their attitudes towards women. I've rarely met this here. My first husband began humiliating me from day one, and so did the rest of his family. They didn't take me for a human being. **Female migrant, Tashkent.**
>
> There's a very high quality of life there, everything in the home is automated. More cultural life. People look after their health more. They place more importance on education. **Male migrant, rural Andijan.**
>
> **From the investigation "Voices of labour migrants" ("Sharkh va Tavsia" Centre, Uzbekistan, 2006)**

[25] *Capital* newspaper. 21 August, 2008.

The activity of permanent and temporary diaspora communities beyond the borders of Central Asia itself is becoming an ever more important factor in cultural processes and trans-cultural influence. They are absorbing many customs and values from the societies in which they currently live, and are disseminating them into the culture of the societies they come from.

The internet, mass media and culture. In the countries of Central Asia there is an established network of electronic and printed mass informational media. In different states this comes under different degrees of governmental control. Control and censorship of the strongest type exist in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In Kazakhstan, Kyrgizstan and Tajikistan, [a] more or less strict [degree of] control is exercised over television, [whereas] radio and print media (newspapers and journals) have a larger degree of freedom. In the Central Asian countries, primarily in the capitals and other cities, cable television is gaining ground - also not so strictly controlled by the authorities.

The main genres which flourish in the private mass media, which are reliant on self-financing, are light entertainment, comedy and soap opera – inexpensive, simple in form and content. In the state-run media (or those operating under [less direct] state control), ideologically-based programmes and news predominate, reporting on culture within strictly prescribed, national boundaries.

An important section of the internet space of Central Asia is occupied by sites created by emigrants from the region and financed by foreign sources. These sites are frequently linked to opposition leaders, parties and figures that have been compelled to leave the region, including for political reasons. The language of these sites tends to be either Russian or English. Amongst the more well known sites in the region is www.ferghana.ru, which has an Uzbek version and which elucidates, in the broadest way, cultural life in the region, particularly a number of different non-governmental, informal activities and projects, which are not often featured in the state mass media. [26]

In Central Asia there is an acute problem of internet access. In Turkmenistan, there are restrictions and in Uzbekistan, many sites are blocked. Apart from this, owing to technical difficulties, the average quality of internet connections is not high. In all of the region's states, the rural population, due to financial and language difficulties, do not use the internet. Another factor is a definite 'generation gap': the majority of internet users are aged between 15 and 40; amongst those over 50, there are significantly fewer users.

[26] Unfortunately, the authorities in Uzbekistan use technical measures to block open access to this and other sites containing "inconvenient" information.

Nevertheless, the internet is a very rapidly developing medium in Central Asia: the network is increasing each year and thanks to some improvements in living standards, the internet is becoming more generally available. The authorities are not capable of controlling the whole internet space, and are not in a position to use administrative measures to contain its expansion. It is precisely the internet which fulfils the role of radio in Soviet times, as a source of alternative (and immediately available) information for the inhabitants of Central Asia. Apart from that, participation in the creation of blogs, or 'living journals', acts both to compensate for the shortcomings or backwardness of the public "space", and is formulating a new communicative space [of its own]. In recent years, internet discussions have often focussed on the most acute questions linked to the development of national identity, the use of Russian language, etc.

Culture and art: official, unofficial and alternative

In the heterogenous cultural space of Central Asia, which brings together a huge variety of experiences, influences, interests, personalities and social trajectories, a no less complex interaction of disparate styles, genres, schools, and art movements is taking place. Classical art forms operate alongside contemporary, including an [artistic] underground, and also with traditional forms of art which have taken on a professional character. Russian-speaking culture exists together with local language culture. A diverse mixture of styles and languages has emerged.

A simplistic division into "official" and "unofficial" art does not always seem relevant here. Parallel to the official national projects, there are also private projects of ethnic art, which appeal to exactly the same notions of "authenticity", but attempt to convey it in new ways.

A general process of degradation of and 'bananification' of the culture of the broad mass of the people, a general lowering of the cultural level of the population, the slow dying and collapse of whole schools (of visual arts, musical, theatre and cinema), which were created over the decades of the "accursed Soviet past" at the cost of huge capital investments and the human resources of several generations of cultural professionals. It has been replaced by costly, "elite" cultural surrogates of a "glamourised" type, directed at a small layer of the cultural elite in the capitals of the new states, and the remains of cultural production are of the Americanised type – "cultural rubbish" – for the broad masses (replicated through tabloid newspapers, press and television).
Alexandr Dzhumaev. "Can we find ourselves in the current of change?" *Druzhba Narodov*, 2008. No.4.

For a number of reasons, in the Soviet period, no major unofficial or underground cultural movements emerged in the Central Asian republics, equivalent to those that appeared in the larger Russian cities and some of the European republics of the USSR. [The region] did not have its own samizdat, or phenomena equivalent to the Lianozovo School, the "Bulldozer Exhibition", etc. With the

exception, in some sense, of the "Ilkhom" theatre in Tashkent, underground tendencies did not take on a "group" form, and generally did not move beyond the bounds of individual artistic strivings.

Apart from this, many patterns of postcolonial culture are relevant to the culture and art of the contemporary states of Central Asia. The dual nature of post-colonial culture is commented on by D.Moore: "the culture of post-colonial countries is characterised by a tension between a desire for autonomy and the legacy of dependence; between aspirations to 'indigenousness' and a hybrid, postcolonial origin; between resistance and complexity; and between imitation (mimicry) and originality."[27] So, artistic production preserves different forms and genres from Western art, usually in their "Soviet" variant, (that is, [as they were] adapted to Russian culture and institutionalised in the Soviet period); however, at the same time traditional [folk] genres are also gaining ground. Granted, in the case of the latter, we can talk only of a strengthening of a tendency already noticeable during the 1970s and 80s: this was the period when there was a significant movement of return to the cultural traditions of the past. The only real novelty during the post-Soviet period has been the more active utilisation of religious and mythological (Sufi, shamanistic, etc.) symbols, including them in a kind of postmodern "game".

Official versions of postcolonial culture in Central Asia are often accompanied by the politics of selective amnesia (towards the Soviet past, Russian-speaking culture, etc.) and a competition [to reclaim] historical symbols (city anniversaries, ancient thinkers, the events of the past, etc.) This is leading to an ever greater fragmentation of the cultural space along national and social fault-lines. Each of these autonomous groups is creating and developing their own "Central Asian culture", which touch and intersect with each other only at a few points.

Literature. During the Soviet period, literature remained the most ideologized and politicised branch of culture. In the republics of Central Asia, a literary model was reproduced which had been peculiar to Russian literature since the 19th century and was reinforced in the Soviet period; this model requires the writer to be a central figure in the culture, a symbolic go-between between the people and the authorities. The Kyrgiz Chingiz Aitmatov, and the Kazakh O.Suliemenov were [in addition to being writers], public figures (they

The most recent developments have torn apart what appeared to be, only 10 years ago, an integral whole with its own centre and periphery, but … this has not led to the disappearance of non-Russian writers writing in Russian … confirmation of this lies in the recent publication of Sabit Madaliev's book of verse "Ruba'i", in which, from all the ancient eastern genres, the 'ruba'i' - the most complex and rigid in verse construction and in the way the author's personality is expressed — is organically reflected through the resources of Russian, again confirming the repute of one of the richest contemporary languages. In the wide context this indicates, together with other factors, that a local subculture, based on Russian, is not only not disappearing, but is showing features of stability.

Yuri Podporenko. "Without rights, but required: Russian language in Uzbekistan". *Druzhba Narodov*, 2001, no.12.

st-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique // PMLA, (Jan., 2001). P.112.

were known, particularly Aitmatov, across the whole Soviet Union). The "Erk" movement[28] at the end of the 1980s, headed by the poet M. Salikh, emerged from beginnings in the Writer's Union.

The disintegration of Soviet cultural institutions dealt a heavy blow to literature. As a result of the collapse of the book market, local writers were practically unable to publish and to live – even partly – on the proceeds of literary work. Despite the continuing existence of the Writer's Union, membership did not carry with it the former financial and administrative incentives. The emigration of a large part of the Russian-speaking population narrowed the reading public to an extreme degree.

Nevertheless, the collapse of the previous system had some positive consequences. Writers got the opportunity to publish their work themselves – even in those countries where censorship was preserved. Self-supporting literary projects and groupings, outside state control, emerged: in Uzbekistan, the "Fergana School" (Sh. Abdullaev, Kh. Zakirov and others) and the "Tashkent School" (S.Yanishev, S.Aflatuni, V. Muratkhanov), the latter [group] has published five issues of the literary almanac *Maly Shelkoviy Putj* [Little Silk Road], 1999-2005; in Kazakhstan, the "Musaget" group, headed by O.B. Markova (which publishes the literary almanac *Appolinariy*). Since 2001, the "Tashkent School" group, together with the S.Yesenin literary museum, have organised the Tashkent Open Poetry Festival – an independent literary project, and the only poetic forum in the region allowing Russian-language authors from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, other post-Soviet countries and further abroad, to come together. Apart from this, despite the outflow of the Russian-speaking population, it was in the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century that there appeared new and outstanding young names in Russian literature: the prose writer M.Zemskov and poet Djumagulov in Kazakhstan; the poets V.Muratkhanov and V. Osadchenko in Uzbekistan; and the prose writer Alex Tork in Kyrgizstan. New journals have also emerged: the *Kurak* almanac in Kyrgizstan and *Knigolyub* [Bibliophile] in Kazakhstan.

The "fat" Soviet literary journals remain, although the Russian language ones (*Zvezda Vostoka* [Eastern Star] in Uzbekistan, *Prostor* [Scope] in Kazakhstan, and *Pamir* in Tajikistan) are experiencing real difficulties – both financial-administrative, and [problems] more widely associated with changes in the general cultural situation in the republics. For example, the editorship of the journal *Zvezda Vostoka* (the former tribune of the liberal Uzbek intelligentsia in 1991-1995, when the seat of editor-in-chief was occupied by Sabit Madaliev) was practically driven out, and the position of editor passed to a more "controllable" literary functionary. Currently, with the arrival in the post of editor-in-chief A.Ustimeko, the journal is attempting to restore its lost position; however the lack of permanent finance means its activities are under threat of complete breakdown.

[28] *Transl. note*: a social-democratic political movement, not a literary movement.

Architecture and monumental art. This sphere of cultural production is mostly regarded by the Central Asian states as a demonstration of their political and economic possibilities and as the main means for visually reflecting their national ideologies.

The most pompous and ambitious architectural projects have been undertaken in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and to a slightly lesser degree, Uzbekistan, which have carried out the restoration of their capital cities. Kyrgizstan and Tajikistan are in a position only to indulge in individual building projects, which nevertheless are presented as great achievements of the authorities. These projects frequently combine to a surprising degree both national and cosmopolitan aspects. For the planning and rebuilding of Ashkhabad and Astana, the authorities have attracted leading world architects, unashamedly and openly [inviting] non-national images and ideas. In the architecture of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan an eclectic, pompous style of administrative buildings, reminiscent of Stalin's "Empire style", with massive colonnades and crowned with a dome, has become firmly established. The buildings of both houses of Parliament and the Timur Museum in Tashkent, and also the Palace of Turkmenbashi, with the square in front of it, closed off by the "Arch of Neutrality" to the north and the "Palace of Rukhiet (Spirituality)" to the south, in Ashgabat, are built in this style.

In the conception of Sapamurad Turkmenbashi, the architectural symbol of neutrality must be a traditional Turkmen "tagan" – a sturdy tripod, used to support a cooking pot, under which a fire is built. This clear image expresses the inextinguishability of the domestic hearth, and the solidity of the communal house, which the state is … crowning the monument is a 12-metre sculptural composition, depicting the first and life president of the country against a billowing flag. ***Ashgabat. The capital of an independent, neutral Turkmenistan:*** photo-album, edited by V.M. Khramov, p92.

Another, no less ideologically "loaded" field of monumental art is the building and rebuilding of monuments. In the first half of the 1990s the new governing elite of the Central Asian states – as in the majority of former Soviet republics – were focussed on the dismantling of Soviet (and sometimes simply Russian) monuments – to historical figures, writers and so on. This process affected Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan most strongly; in Tashkent, in addition to monuments to Soviet figures, monuments to Russian writers Gorky and Gogol were also dismantled (to all appearances, the process of removal of monuments with Soviet connotations is still not complete in Uzbekistan – in 2008 the monument to the Friendship of Nations was dismantled). In place of the monuments taken away - and also in other places – were erected new monuments, reflecting the nation-centred conservative ideologies of the new regimes. So, almost all the states erected a grandiose monument to Independence (augmented in Ashkhabad with a gilded figure of Turkmenbashi himself). A large number of the remaining monuments were erected in the honour of mythologised historical figures – leaders and figures from the nation's imaginary 'golden age'. Examples include the monuments to Emir Timur, Alisher Navoi, and Ulugbek in

Uzbekistan; the monumental group around the monument to independence (Oguz-Khan, Seljuk-Khan, Sultan Sanjar and others) in Ashgabat; the monument to Ismoil Samini in Dushanbe; the historical-cultural complex "Manas-Ordo" in Kyrgizstan, etc. It is typical that, despite the representation of the Russian and Soviet period in negative tones in the official ideologies, there are no monuments of any figures who fought against the colonial and Soviet powers (seemingly, the current presidents prefer to reserve the role of the main "fighters" for themselves).

Decorative and applied art. In contrast to architecture and sculpture, creative art is of less interest to the authorities of the Central Asian countries. One section of the artistic community provide for their needs by manufacturing products sold as symbols, gifts, etc. In this sphere, "applied folk art" in particular has been evolving.

The most active consumers of decorative art are foreign tourists and private entrepreneurs. It is towards this market that the artists themselves, and also a scattering of independent galleries (for example "B-Studio" in Kyrgizstan) are oriented.

Overall, contemporary visual art finds itself in a difficult position. The fate of the unique museum of avant-garde art in Nukus (Uzbekistan) is instructive. This unique collection, of huge value and, at the same time, in no way subscribes to the traditionalist tastes and simplistic forms of the "national ideology". The Uzbek authorities cannot utilise this museum for their own ideological ends, but neither can they deny its value.

Cinema and theatre. Film production finds itself in a comparatively happy position. After a decade of different kinds of difficulties and transitional problems, this type of cultural production is on the way up again. The authorities devote attention to this sector due to its important ideological and symbolic function, financing films about historical figures and events, which are made to symbolise an age of return to "traditional roots". The international market for films and the system of festivals stimulate private financial investment in film projects with elements of "ethnic art". The internal market also creates conditions [for film projects] to be self-financing, and sustains interest in film production, including relatively cheap and popular TV serials. All these factors taken together provide opportunities for the cinematic arts and their associated institutions to develop and adapt themselves to the new realities. [29]

[29] For more details on this, see G. Abikeeva, …*Works*

After a boom in film production at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, when graduates of the Moscow institutes came to work in Central Asian cinematography, in the middle of the decade, there was a decline [in film production] caused by economic difficulties. The region's television [schedules] and cinemas were filled with foreign films and serials. Turkmenistan practically stopped producing films towards the end of the 1990s. The majority of Tajik film directors were forced to leave the country and make films in Russia and Europe.

An exception was Uzbekistan, where the state maintained a system of film distribution, with the result that films on historical themes, comedies and melodramas, were able to be self-financing. Film production was calculated exclusively on the internal market, (although it is popular in the market of neighbouring countries as well), and was not very actively promoted on the global distribution network or at international festivals. However, the format of genres and aesthetics of Uzbek cinema remains rather narrow, and many film directors have left the country.

After the end of the 1990s, film production in Central Asia began to revive. In Kyrgizstan, partial state funding of film projects was restored, film production re-oriented itself towards private, mainly foreign investment, and a number of independent/arthouse films were made, aimed at the international festivals. Kazakhstan mainly financed historical films. The experience of making the film "Nomad" was representative: it was made to the standards of American cinema (with the active recruitment of an international team of actors and technicians), and at the same time charged with national-exotic themes. Private film studios make festival films and independent/arthouse cinema. At the same time semi-professional, cheap cinematic forms have appeared which are directed at the internal mass market.

The theatrical arts have developed in a completely different way.[30] Large theatres with classical productions are in a situation of stagnation, both financial and in terms of the repertoire. The state is not particularly interested in them, but has not put a stop to their activities. Audiences are reluctant to attend, and the box office takings are not enough to provide support for either personnel or buildings. Only the assistance of private companies and foreign sponsors helps maintain their professional activities. It is easier for small and more mobile theatrical troupes to survive, performing in more contemporary, including "ethno" genres, but they too are oriented mostly towards international investment, foreign tours and also private corporate functions (the "Sakhna", "Klub-i-mesto-D" theatres in Kyrgizstan, "Artishok" in Kazakhstan). Only a few theatres, for example the "Ilkhom" in Uzbekistan, succeed in entertaining both local and foreign audiences. "Ilkhom" fulfils one other important function

[30] For an overview of theatres in Central Asia see: *Tordjman S.* An Introduction to Theatre Today in Central Asia and Afghanistan. An IETM Publication, 2006.

– it carries out training for theatre actors and directors from the other Central Asian states. (Although, at the present time, after the murder of the founder and director of the theatre Mark Weil – which to this day is unsolved – the theatre is experiencing major difficulties).

For the past two decades, the aesthetics of Central Asian theatre have undergone a sea-change.[31] A strengthening of interest in eastern, Central Asian themes (for example M.Weil's productions *Beliy, beliy, chyerniy aist* ["White, white black stork"], *Radenie s granatom* ["Zeal with a pomegranate"], and *Polyoti Mahsraba* ["Mashrab's flights"]); even the action of plays from the European classics are transposed to Central Asia and interpreted with a local, "eastern" inflection - for example O. Khodjakuli's production of "King Lear", 2001 or M.Weil's production of "The Lucky Beggars".

Both cinema and theatre in Central Asia have a fairly active festival circuit. Amongst regional theatrical initiatives it is worth noting the theatrical festival "Navruz", which used to take place in the mid-1990s, the Kyrgiz festival "Aitmatov and the Theatre" (1999), The Central Asian / European Theatrical Forum in Tashkent in 2004, and Dushanbe in 2005, the international "Flying" theatrical academy of M.Tsoner in Almata, and others. Central Asian theatres have performed also at the Moscow Chekhov festival and at other international festivals. Film festivals take place in the region – an international festival of independent/arthouse cinema "Kinostan" in Kyrgizstan (since 2007), the "Didor" festival in Dushanbe, etc.

When, after the premiere of an opera, I asked the deputy minister of culture (of Uzbekistan) why his government was spending it's already meagre financial resources on the support of cultural institutions, inherited from the era of Russian colonialism, he answered: "Because we want to be part of the rest of the world: we want our cultural professionals to have [the opportunity] , like cultural professionals in other countries, to take part in international competitions" … Another reason for preserving the status-quo is bureaucratic inertia. As someone told me in Uzbekistan, "To enable the complete change of these institutions, you need to literally change the blood of people, guiding them along the way, which is hardly possible." It seems, Europeanisation "from above" is still being actively carried out in the cultural life of Uzbekistan.

Theodore Levin,* "The Reterritorialization of Culture in the New Central Asian States: A Report from Uzbekistan."** ***Yearbook for Traditional Music, **Vol. 25, Musical Processes in Asia and Oceania. (1993), p.54**

Music. Popular music[32] is in a relatively fortunate position, having a wide internal market for both audio and video production, and also various kinds of concerts, including many traditional "gala" concerts, organised by the authorities and by private individuals. Singers [on the variety circuit] have great popularity, are close to the authorities, influence public opinion and have fairly serious earning

[31] European theatre in the Islamic world: post-Soviet transformations in the theatrical arts in the countries of Central Asia: a handbook of reports from the international conference, Tashkent, 2-4 April 2003 (Tashkent, 2003).

[32] The Russian word *Estrada* implies a very mainstream type of 'variety' style of pop music for which there is no direct equivalent in English though this slightly "antiquated" term may be closer than "pop music".

power. Traditional musical genres utilise state support, and are an important symbol of national self-awareness and national ideology.

Classical European music, opera and ballet, whose support was prioritised during Soviet times, have found themselves in a more difficult position; they are now no longer in a position to survive economically [by themselves] and are gradually losing their prestige status. In Turkmenia, opera and ballet were for some time banned by the official cultural *nomenklatura* as incompatible with national traditions; in Uzbekistan the question of the worth of preserving them was discussed; in Tajikistan, due to economic problems, these musical art forms have practically ceased to exist. Interest in them is manifested only by a Russian-speaking audience in the capital cities, and the authorities use them most of all to gain international recognition.

Alternative musical genres survive mostly thanks to [individual] enthusiasm, international support or the support of private enterprise. Music festivals take place in the republics, including jazz and rock festivals. The authorities, and the majority or society are indifferent to this arena of music – both of them regarding it as an alien [form of] culture.

Conclusions

1. Central Asia is situated outside the major cultural centres of the world – geographically and politically, as well as in the intellectual sense of the word. Finding themselves between different global powers, the elites have failed to clearly express their cultural priorities and the direction of their development for either the outside world or for their own citizens. Dealing with immediate problems by appealing to conflicting models - the West, Russia, the Muslim community as a whole, Turkey, Iran, and South-East Asia - results in cultural chaos and confusion. This is disorientating for the elite, the citizens and foreign partners. The authorities in the Central Asian states (to varying degrees, of course) do not have any clear, stable, long term strategy of action. This renders doubtful and unstable any agreements with them or attempts to influence their plans or concepts, including in the cultural sphere. The authorities attempt to control ideas and resources that pass through international channels, or, where possible, involve themselves in the distribution of these resources in order to serve their own ideological agendas.

2. Contemporary Central Asia is not a united community. Every state has its own political and economic means of influencing cultural development, its own view of the future, and its own

conception of relations with the outside world. Regardless of many announcements to the contrary, the links amongst these countries and their citizens are rather weak: cultural exchange and joint cultural projects are practically non-existent. Occasional joint projects sponsored by outside donors create only an illusion of unity. [These countries'] isolation from each other is taking on an irreversible and even hostile character.

3. Within society, the gap is continuing to widen between the elite and ordinary people, between the capitals and the provinces, the urban and rural populations, and between Russian-speaking and non Russian-speaking citizens. The everyday life of a significant part of the population of the region is more and more defined by Islamic norms and preferences. This part of the population remains outside the processes of intercultural exchange and their cultural practices are either archaic (local) or have a strong religious-puritan character. More and more people from rural areas are moving to urban centres, thus diluting cultural customs and hierarchies. Secular, Europeanised and Russified culture is accessible to a narrow and continually decreasing social group within the [local] elite and to the Russian speaking minority. Various kinds of projects aimed at preserving the identity and status of these social and cultural minorities in reality only preserve existing divisions within society and escalate conflicts between the different groups.

4. The main ideological framework of all states in the region remains nationalism. Despite having variations in the conception of their aims, all the ruling elites appeal to 'roots', 'traditions', and 'authentic culture', leaving the assorted ethnic minorities outside the bounds of the official cultural space. Nationalism dominates the public cultural space, determining tastes, artistic imagination, imagery, and the character of debate. The authorities attempt to monitor the cultural sphere and do not tolerate anything that contradicts the official ideology. Sometimes this control is of a pre-emptive and very subjective nature. At the same time, agreements between individuals, on a national and regional level, take place which allow the authorities to turn a blind eye to [the dissemination of] certain not entirely orthodox or not [easily] understandable[33] cultural ideas. The authorities, too preoccupied with their own problems, are not capable of keeping all activity in the cultural sphere under control. In some cases control is delegated to bureaucrats of a lower level who are not competent to assess cultural projects.

[33] The sense appears to be that culture can be allowed to go against official ideology when it is too obscure to be easily understood by a mass audience, but this is interpretative. *Not entirely transparent* may be an alternative?

5. The secular, western type of culture is to a large degree based on a Soviet infrastructure of institutions which can exist only with state funding. Due to rather low living standards and the domination of local and (increasingly) religious practices amongst the majority of the local population, these institutions are not in a condition to become self-supporting business propositions.

6. Cultural production, apart from a few prestigious and symbolic projects, has been transferred into the autonomous or semi-autonomous [spheres]. Low wages in the public sector do not provide sufficient income and many workers in the cultural sphere, especially outside the capitals; need to seek additional income, which results in them losing their professional skills. Many spheres of culture survive thanks to the activity of enthusiasts, and also the financial support of international programmes, grants, and investments. This kind of support results not so much in any change in society itself, but rather transfers the projects and people - temporarily or permanently - from Central Asia to Russia, Europe, and other countries, where there has appeared a kind of 'virtual' or 'diaspora' Central Asia. The region is becoming a kind of 'cultural reservation' (as one expert I asked in Kyrgizstan put it) for lovers of the exotic. Different powers, including local nationalist elites, private business, non-governmental organizations, and foreign donors, each with their own aims, participate in the creation of this exotica. Together they invent a local 'culture', far from the daily needs of the population of Central Asia.

7. There is no single long-term tendency which would allow us to predict stable development for cultural institutions in Central Asian countries. On the contrary, we are seeing an increasing fragmentation of the cultural space, the strengthening and spread of local and religious practices, the creation of intercultural barriers and formation of isolationist ideologies. No short-term, one-off projects, however impressive they seem, are sufficient to reverse these more fundamental processes and tendencies. It requires funds and measures comparable with the intervention of Soviet times, in order to preserve the gains made and develop further. These actions are possible only with the participation of the states and local elites.

8. The systemic weakness of the authorities, their inability [to exercise] ideological, political and financial intervention, raises the question of whether a decentralized model of culture can develop and exist in the region. Individual successful examples – such as the Uzbek theatre "Ilkhom" – show that cultural institutions can survive and develop without state support. Consequently they will create an institutional environment around them and become the nuclei

around which cultural authorities and hierarchies will form, that is [they will become] cultural "attractors". It is not yet clear how viable such forms are in the long-term perspective and to what extent they can affect the wider population. Tendencies amongst the ruling elite, such as the reinforcement of state control and the change in priorities towards the popularisation of more primitive cultural tastes, carry many risks for a model of this kind. Certainly these risks are distributed unevenly across the different countries of the region: a decentralized model looks more realistic for Kazakhstan, Kyrgizstan and Tajikistan than for Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan.

9. The pessimistic views on the situation in Central Asia that are explicitly and implicitly expressed in the previous paragraphs, should not be seen as a final verdict, but rather as an attempt to draw attention to a number of acute problems and negative tendencies. It is an invitation to reconsider our attitude towards the current processes in the region; a suggestion that we discuss again the programmes and plans that can and should be realized here. There are [still] some tendencies that can overcome the negative nature of [the current] cultural developments. They include a strengthening of the processes of globalisation: migration, tourism and development of information networks and communications. Besides, as one expert in Kyrgizstan expressed it in conversation, in Central Asian society there is "a great shortage of events in general, and in the cultural sphere in particular" – this stimulates the interest of people of different social groups in novelties. The states of Central Asia, despite all their problems, remain an important part of the world community; members of UN, OSCE, and other international organisations, and part of the Russian-speaking world (and therefore 'western' in the wider meaning of the term). The processes of globalisation and Soviet heritage, mentioned above, continue to keep the region in the sphere of Western, European, and Russian influence– despite serious antagonisms between Russia and the West, both powers have much in common in the field of culture. In conclusion, the international community, [represented by] international organisations, should maintain their presence in Central Asia: to influence the authorities, the elites, and society; and to use all the tools available to overcome the negative tendencies, and to preserve [these countries] within the space of active cultural interaction and exchange.

Appendix of Recommendations

A move from general and sometimes schematic reasoning, to recommendations – which require a different level of responsibility and a more detailed look at practical measures and actions, always looks risky and presumptuous. It is unlikely to be within the competence of an individual expert, however much information he possesses (and what expert can know everything?), to confidently give out advice concerning different countries, and on [such a] wide variety of themes. Nevertheless, it seems impossible to avoid some discussion of the possible principles of practical action in the sphere of culture and arts. This requires the use of the strict genre of "analytical notes".

1. Which local organizations in the region represent the most significant potential cultural actors of development and change? What are their aims, and what have they achieved to date? What is the most useful way that international NGOs could help them achieve their mission?

In my opinion, it is necessary to concentrate on long-term projects [in collaboration] with institutions and organisations that already have material resources, staff, their own cultural programmes, additional sources of funding and an existing circle of partners and consumers. These may be universities, theatres, libraries, and editorial boards of journals – carefully selected, both in the capitals and in the regions. They may be assisted in establishing partnerships with colleagues in different countries and with private business, and included in a number of international projects. They may be assisted in developing their programme by cooperation with local regional cultural institutions, for which they could become leading organisations and sponsors. As an anonymous official from the Ministry of Culture of Tajikistan said, "International organisations should concentrate on large investment projects of a strategic, rather than a tactical, character. For example, [projects] connected with publishing, book distribution, or with circus art, etc. Unfortunately, international organisations offer small grants which not only don't produce any real results, but even worse, in some cases are disruptive to [existing] cultural structures". Here I will also cite a long quotation from an interview with one of my correspondents from Kazakhstan: "I used to work for an international organisation, and I know that maybe only one tenth of the "cultural" projects which receives money, produce some kind of result, apart from the redistribution of the same money. In other words, in a slightly veiled form, it was simply supplementary income for many cultural professionals. That is not so terrible - but still, it is rather sad if books, published with the resources of an international organisation, are left to rot in a basement - because the fund is not allowed to get involved in business and therefore, in distribution; or if there is almost no audience at a performance staged by an international organisation; or if seminars and courses give nothing to their participants apart from the contacts (quite useful, of course) that they make with each other. God forbid, I don't want to offend anyone, I know from my own experience the

importance of the activities of such organisations … But in my opinion, the main purpose of such international organisations is demonstrative. Their purpose is to show society (and not the state!) the abilities and power of public organisations, whether they are trade unions or charities. When society understands that better, it will start organising itself on this principle, and will actively influence the country's politics … That's my view. In any case, the work of international organisations in the countries we're talking of is indispensable at the moment. But one could wish that they acted less "officiously" … One could wish the projects sponsored didn't turn into a feeding-trough for an exclusive group who have cleverly managed to adjust themselves towards the main activities of one fund or another (for example, one providing support exclusively to contemporary art); shrewdly formulating mission-statements and projects and cleverly putting together a tailor-made budget." This is a very common point of view in the region.

2. How can policy changes in the domain of culture be instigated? Is direct collaboration with state organizations an option, and if so, in what areas? What is the likelihood that policy can be influenced through such partnerships? If this is unlikely, what intermediaries might serve as effective partners?

Cooperation with governmental structures (ministries, educational and academic institutions, regional authorities, etc.) is one of the most desired, though risky, conditions for the realization of cultural programmes. The purpose of such collaboration is to involve the authorities in cultural processes, in order to restore, with their help, the infrastructural base of culture; to broaden the horizons of officials and to alter their ideologized views on the role of culture. It is desirable, however, that this partnership does not take on a financial character, but consists rather in the creation of joint councils of experts, editorial boards, prize commissions, and joint groups for developing new cultural projects and holding seminars and conferences. It would be beneficial to develop 'parity' funding of events and initiatives (or multilateral, with the involvement of private businesses or other countries). The most likely direction of such collaboration is the organisation of competitions in different fields of arts and culture on a national or Central Asian level.

3. How can art be used to create not only a cultural space but a political space in which controversial policy issues can be openly debated? What kind of projects could most effectively support attempts to fortify the role of art as social critique?

In Central Asia, the arts, unlike in the West and in Russia, have never played an independent political role and have very rarely presented themselves as a form of social critique. In the main, the arts have had an 'enlightenment' and 'status' function. In my opinion, it is necessary to repair and support these functions in the first place. Projects should have a more educational purpose, assist with career development and the improvement of qualifications; they should provide new and full information about the history of art, about

contemporary trends and genres, and about tendencies in the development of culture. An effective project with this orientation would be the launch of a cross-regional literary-promotional magazine and Internet portal that can be accessed from all the countries in Central Asia. Other, more demanding, projects could include: the acquisition of literature for libraries – not only in the capitals, but also in the regions; extending university libraries; the development of specialised (thematically organised) collections of literature and also the development of a library exchange infrastructure. Also worth attention is the creation of electronic libraries, accessed via the Internet. One example worthy of note is the Library Consortium, founded in Kyrgizstan. Its initiatives and consistent work are reflected in the condition of the university libraries, the application of innovative technologies and the partial translation of library resources into electronic form; the Library Consortium also successfully collaborates with regional libraries.

4. What strategies might be developed to help transform state-sponsored representations of cultural heritage and patrimony away from bombastic nationalism toward more nuanced forms that offer multiple perspectives?

No simple recipes or measures exist that would help to break [the grip of] nationalism and replace it with more flexible and more pluralistic conceptions. It is especially difficult to change the state-sponsored, nationalistic paradigm which has been accepted in all the countries of Central Asia as an official ideology. The most effective strategies here may [turn out to] be any joint activities within the framework of the whole Central Asian region and on the scale of wider international links. These projects should include elements of dialogue and dispute, should be relocatable from one region to another, and involve a mass audience and the mass media. This could be a regular forum for cultural professionals, joint book publications, albums, film co-productions, etc.

5. What is the status of minority cultural streams in the nations of Central Asia? How are they represented in the spheres of expressive culture, spiritual culture, and material culture?

In Central Asia ethnic minorities are, as a rule, institutionalised, and receive some funding from the state (and also from private businesses), [both] in the country of residence and also from the countries they are associated with. Therefore, the cultures of these minorities (in the sense of folkloric activities) are not under threat of disappearance. A more complex problem is the integration of representatives of ethnic minorities into society and public life, bypassing formal national institutions, since there are so many linguistic and behavioural barriers separating the ethnic groups. In Soviet times this problem was addressed by introducing a national quota, with the help of which the minorities got access to education and administrative structures. Perhaps, today it is necessary to reintroduce a similar system of 'positive discrimination', both on the national level and in the spheres of action of international organisations. This could [take the form of] the

obligatory representation of different ethnic groups (not only the large and powerful ones, but also minorities) in the various projects and institutions supported by international funds.

6. What opportunities exist for arts managers, presenters, scholars, entrepreneurs, and other professionals to develop their careers? To what extent has cultural tourism been developed as an economic resource? How do artists engage with other social and economic sectors of society?

The sphere of culture in Central Asia possesses a number of problems – from financial, to ones of status. An increase in funding does not automatically lead to its development and prosperity. Apart from funding, there is also the problem of creating and preserving cultural schools, traditions and institutions. For instance, tourism, though it is one of the sources of cultural funding, often also encourages the simplification and commercialization of cultural activities, customising them to [fit] comfort[ing notions] and a view of local culture as exotica. This also applies to the prospects for the interaction of culture with local private business - which by means of their money might not only create, but also destroy cultural values and schools, replacing them with short-term and simplified cultural projects. More purposeful collaboration of international organisations with representatives of medium and big business should show the latter the importance of culture for the economic development of the region, the necessity of investing in long-term cultural projects and institutions, and the creation of the cultural infrastructure.

7. What evidence exists of regional collaboration and networking activities among arts professionals across country borders?

In Central Asia various joint events are organised in different spheres of culture – festivals, concert tours, exhibitions, exchanges of experience in the format of workshops, etc. Professionals from the region are also represented on various international forums and networks. Participation in such activity may either receive state support, or is financed (often) by international organisations and third countries; other types of exchange and collaboration happen on the basis of [personal] initiative. Events of this kind as well, and 'networked' projects [spreading] across different countries in the region, deserve attention and support. The emphasis should be placed on widening the circle of participants by the inclusion of different social and ethnic groups, different regions and rural areas. I also suggest taking strong notice of activities of Central Asian diaspora communities abroad, as their role and influence in the Central Asian society increases.

8. What are the key needs articulated by artists and arts managers who work in autonomous or quasi-autonomous cultural organizations? How do their priorities compare with those articulated by state ministerial officials?

Cultural workers talk about the necessity of infrastructure – a continuous cycle of education and skills improvement in different, including auxiliary disciplines; access to information and [opportunities] for participation in international events; the development of contemporary material resources – publishing houses, scenery and stage props, art studios, premises and instruments for rehearsals, etc. Not many [cultural workers] take notice of the censorial constraints or ideological boundaries that the authorities have formulated around cultural projects. Ministerial officials cannot articulate their priorities clearly, mainly referring to the necessity of preserving the "national culture" and complaining about the lack of funds. In my opinion, there are no major points of controversy between the state officials and cultural workers. The problem is rather that both parties are cut off from the majority of the population, and they express only their own collective interests and views, while the mechanisms of their interaction with society have weakened or disappeared. There is a need for continuous communication, not only between cultural workers and officials but also for [them to engage in] a dialogue with society, represented by different groups and sections of the population. It is necessary for cultural workers and officials to hear the responses of the people that consume culture and ideology. International organisations could help facilitate such a dialogue and in create a suitable space for it – in the form of internet sites, magazines, forums of different kinds, the operation of joint expert groups on different problems, etc. I am not really able to recommend completely new projects of this kind. I would rather recommend making the activity of these projects more open, more public, more of a 'mass' character, and inclusive of a more diverse range of participants.

9. Where, and to what extent, can one find innovative, interdisciplinary and risk-taking art projects; especially those which lack adequate institutional support in Central Asia; of any genre, such as contemporary dance, digital arts, etc.

Innovative cultural projects undoubtedly deserve attention and support, because that part of the contemporary culture of Central Asia that has emerged from a mixture of Russian, European and local traditions has always had an acute interest in any innovation as a means for reinforcing its own cultural identity. Particular attention should be paid to the student community, as it is highly sensitive to innovations and may assist with their dissemination to other social groups. However, it is important to be aware that the contemporary audience for such projects is very limited and has a number of particularities with regards to living-place, level of education, age, and even ethnic group. These projects would find enthusiastic support in capitals and larger cities, but are unlikely to be interesting to ordinary provincial dwellers. As one publisher from Kazakhstan described her objective: "It is to give readers really clever and professionally made texts, regardless of politics, business, national, race or gender interests, political correctness or coterie intrigues. Such publications (based on the experience of a wider global history) always have a small circulation and are doomed to a brief life, as they exist as if in a vacuum, and they belong to nobody: they

serve the interests of neither government officials nor oligarchs; they cannot be used as an instrument for extracting advertising revenue or pumping someone's ratings, they are not even useful for improving the public image of politicians or poets. It is pure art, art for an exclusive group, but not to any extent the elitist art, as elitist art is, in fact, quite well adapted to contemporary demands. I believe that it is necessary to give people the opportunity – without any calculations or 'PR', without money or intrigue - to immerse themselves in literature. While I have the ability to do it, I will keep publishing *Knigolyub* ["Bibliophile"]. Knowing in advance, that it is doomed to be little-known and soon forgotten."